

TUESDAY, 4/28/20

SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear

Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)

Title: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Pt. 2

Let's pick it up where we left off yesterday in the book of Daniel, Chapter 3, beginning at Verse 8 ...

⁸Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

⁹They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O King, live forever! ¹⁰You, O King, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O King, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." ¹

The worship begins, but some people's hearts were not on their adoration of the statue but rather on defamation of character. The text says some astrologers were there, but instead of complete prostration they keep their heads up to see if the three Jews were again standing by their convictions.

Don't you just dislike people like that? People who are looking to catch you doing something so they can get you in trouble. It's one thing to be caught for doing something wrong or sinful. But it's something else to be sought out and watched for doing something good!

Now, we don't know why these astrologers had a bone to pick with these guys. Perhaps these astrologers were the ones who were bypassed for their own promotion because of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They had a bone to pick, and this was their golden opportunity. So, they go to the King and throw them under the bus.

It appears that the three were prepared for this test. They do not bow down. But what do they experience because of their noncompliance? Persecution. In fact, one commentator said this was likely the first Biblical record of religious persecution. And unfortunately, as we know, it's not the last.

We must be aware that when we live out our convictions, persecution can follow.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Da 3:8–12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

So not only should be prepared, but we also need to **be aware**.

Be aware that if you choose to live out an authentic faith, if you choose to be obedient to Christ as Lord, if you choose to take the words of the Bible to heart and live them out faithfully, be aware persecution will likely come.

The Bible tells us that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion ready to jump and devour us. This can come in various ways, but one way for sure is through persecution because of living out our faith.

Don't believe me? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me" (Matt. 5:11).

How do you know you are living an authentic faith? People will notice, and it may mean persecution, according to Paul and Jesus. And when persecution happens, we are blessed. We can be content. When we are weak, through His power, we can be strong.

Now, persecution isn't foreign to us today, is it? Post a Christian article online and prepare for a potential debate, ending with some name-calling. Bakers are forced to close because they live out their Christian convictions. Pastors have been told if they preach certain lifestyles are sinful, they can be arrested. Talk about the sanctity of life and prepare for the onslaught of "tolerant" intolerance and name-calling.

I've seen this negative response and persecution when responding to COVID-19. I've been vocal about being responsible, but not being fearful. I've been discussing with people in the community about choosing faith over fear. That doesn't mean being negligent or irresponsible. But it does mean living in a way that shows wisdom and dependence upon God. But the general response has been of anger and persecution for approaching this situation from a Christian worldview.

But we know that brothers and sisters in Christ are being persecuted in much harder ways. People are losing jobs because of their faith. I have connections in the Middle East with people who are being sought after for their faith. They're being beaten. Their homes are being destroyed. Their families are being destroyed. They're even being martyred for their faith.

Discussion:

N: So Arnie and Cara, from your perspective, how have you experienced persecution because of your faith and how did you handle it?

A: I have a great story and it's actually true, which even makes it even better. So I'm in one of those [better fact-check this], I'm in one of those closed countries and I'm at the airport and we're going deeper on this trip and they suspect that I'm a missionary. They're going, you know, first I had to go in this room, and they strip search you, you know, which is kind of humiliating. Then

they went through my stuff and I'm a diabetic, an insulin-dependent diabetic. I need that stuff to live. And the guy took all of my stuff, all of my insulin, all of my things that went with my insulin, took them and threw them in the trash, and he said, go and get on the airplane. And usually I'm kind of a gruff, grumpy guy, and I didn't say anything. I just said thank you. And I went and sat on the plane and I thought, well it's probably because I'm a Christ follower and the guy hates Christians and you know, I understand he's lost. About five minutes later, the captain of security came with all of my stuff.

He'd taken it out of the trashcan and cleaned it up and he said, don't ever let my men do that to you; you could die without this stuff. And looking back and reflecting on that, really the Spirit of the Lord just, I mean, It just took over. Instead of getting angry and belligerent, which granted it doesn't do you much good in those kinds of situations, but still I needed the medicine, but the Lord gave me a peace that really passed all understanding and it was pretty, pretty cool. So that is a very unusual story of persecution that is one in a million. But, you know, I experienced it and I really grew from it. I'd like to say it's because I'm such a godly guy, but really it's because the Lord intervened and had me shut up for once in my life and just let Him work things out.

N: Wow, that's crazy.

C: I think that's important too Arnie that you, I could say that me personally experiencing persecution, you know, you're outside of the United States and that's what you're experiencing. In the United States, we're not that persecuted. I mean, somebody might not like us for what we believe. I find though that if you reverse that and you respond, like Arnie responded, that our faith will actually attract people who are not believers, more so than allowing people to persecute us. So when they're in a trial, they're going to seek reasons to why that is happening to them. And they mostly come to Christians for that. I would even go further to say that if you believe you're being persecuted, and you're responding to people say on social media, that perhaps you're not really being persecuted, but maybe you're being a jerk.

N: Very true.

A: You know, I'll be sure to suggest that.

N: Yeah. I think we need to be very careful how we handle ourselves in, I would say real life, as well as social media and wherever we're at. I think it's important that we are carrying ourselves in a way that brings glory to God, but also has a posture that we are a beacon of hope and light rather than always a point of controversy.

C: When you see, you know, Paul - was it him in the prison Nat? - [Yep] where you know there's the earthquake, but they stayed and the guards, the guys guarding them, saw that they stayed, and then they believed, because it was in their actions that even though they were being persecuted, just like Arnie, that it was in his action. Like maybe that guy would say, well, this guy responded so well. He just got on the plane; they didn't leave the prison. And so, through that action then someone might believe.

N: Right, yeah. And Philippians One talks about how Paul is in chains and he says, because of what's happened to me, the Gospel is being spread and received. He spent two years in a prison

in Rome being chained to five guards a day and his posture didn't change. He leveraged the trial he was going through to pray without ceasing. And to meet people where they're at and to share the Good News, both in his posture of how he lived inside that prison cell, but also how he spoke to his guards and to the people around him. That's exactly what you're talking about and exactly what we need to do. Quite challenging though.

So we know that we're to be prepared for the trials in our lives, but we're also supposed to be aware that when we stand firm, stand faithful and stand on God's Word, persecution is going to come. But being aware doesn't mean living in paranoia or thinking that everyone is out to get us, but there are times it can feel like it. So how would you coach someone who is listening today to be aware of their circumstances, but also live in a way, as you said, Cara, that is as a light in a dark world, with a posture of love and outreach?

C: Well, I always think all interactions are divine appointment, so to speak. So God is orchestrating this, these awesome interactions that we have with people. You know, nothing surprises God, and He's always working and He's always orchestrating something good. Like this virus, it doesn't surprise God. He was making arrangements for it back before, in the beginning. So the people I interact with, I just figure God put me in the path of this person. If that is so, give me an opportunity to talk about my faith or Jesus. And so I would encourage people to be aware of those opportunities because you never know what God is orchestrating. It's pretty awesome.

N: Wow, that's so good.

A: But I think it's easy for a lady to say that. Us guys, at least a lot of the guys I know, if they get in a situation that maybe they're persecuted because of their beliefs, in America, it's usually being ridiculed or mocked. A lot of guys, me included, sometimes, especially if you aren't so aware of it, you respond in anger and you want to make it right. You want to set the stage right. And oftentimes, that's probably the worst response that you could have. And as far as your testimony goes, it's like you're not any different than any other hothead, so it's really a challenge for us to respond to persecution in a proper way. And I think guys struggle maybe more than women do. I don't know.

N: Yeah, I know. I know that's true for me. When people respond negatively or come back, my gut reaction is to become defensive and to lash out, but we know that Jesus said not to do that. It's better instead to love our enemies and to show kindness to them and to pray for them than it is to come back in anger, but that takes dependence upon God and a real trust that He will do what's right in His way, in his timing.

Regardless of the form of persecution you are experiencing for your faith, it is not meaningless, far from it. We'll answer the question of "what good comes from my tests and trials that come from my faith?" in just a minute.

But in order to be ready for the tests and trials, we need to be prepared. Trials are going to happen. And we, too, need to be aware that authentic faith produces true persecution.

Isn't this encouraging? Believe it or not, it actually is. We'll see why as we continue in the story.

In verses 13-15, the King has a temper tantrum. He screams and shouts and demands these disobedient Jews answer for their crimes. He actually does a shocking thing: he gives them a second chance to bow down.

But look at their response in Verse 16.

¹⁶ “ O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” ²

Their answer tells us a lot. They say, look, you can throw us into the fire. God, our God – the one true God, the same God you recognized a few years ago as the top God, He can save us. In fact, we are confident that He will save us. But even if He chooses not to, we serve God alone. We will not bow down.

These young men show us they truly love and believe in God, His sovereignty, and His goodness. They’re totally confident in God. And so should we if we are to be ready for tests and trials. We need to **Be Confident in God**.

As Christians, we are not to be mastered by our feelings. We are not to be overwhelmed by the tests, the trials, the fiery furnaces, or anything else. Why? Because we know as they knew that: Our God is an awesome God! Our God is greater. Our God is stronger. There is no one like our God!

How do you build such confidence? Read the Bible from cover to cover. You will encounter verses like Psalm 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?” God’s been faithful to His people for all time. We have no reason to fear.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (4:13). He will also provide you the strength and resources to endure any challenge to see His purpose accomplished. So read and take in His faithfulness and goodness. Also look over your life and the lives of friend and family and recount His goodness and faithfulness.

Discussion:

These young men have a deep confidence in God. They believe in who God is and that He is faithful. They've looked back on their life. In other words, they have reasons to believe in that

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Da 3:16–18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

confidence. So let's talk about the connection between our confidence, based on evidence and our actions. Arnie and Cara, how have you grown in your confidence in God?

C: Well, I'd say trials are probably the biggest. I mean, God shows up and then I rely on what I know to be true about God, which gives me confidence. I know with this virus, what is challenging me right now is, my contentment. I think it's a choice. Christian contentment is this ability to be satisfied for what God has lovingly provided me in every situation. And I'm confident that God is going to have my back, no matter what that looks like. So contentment and joy is eternal. So I just choose to believe God tells the truth and I confidently go forward in that.

N: What about you, Arnie?

A: Yeah, I would echo what Cara is saying. I'd even carry it further. I call it complainaria. And that is, where you just have a negative outlook on what I can't do, and I can't do this. I can't, I can't, I can't. And it just takes not only yourself down, but everybody else down. And so how do you get through this? Well, this is a wonderful time for all of us to have confidence in God. I mean, really, we've already won the battle. When you think about it, this is a tremendous thing, because unlike the world who doesn't believe in Jesus, we've already won, which is a tremendous leg up in this battle. So it's not a good time to complain about what you can't do. It's a great time to actually do something.

N: So what I'm hearing you say, is we need to have a Heavenly perspective, so we can be more Earthly good. Is that right? [Yeah]. What were you going to say Cara?

C: Well, I was saying this is from a guy who's had numerous heart attacks, cancer, and I've never seen anyone more joyful and content than Arnie Cole. And it goes to show you, I'm sure Arnie, if you were to write down a journal of what went on in those darker times from day to day, that you would see, you could go back and see where God has answered prayers, He's shown up, and the things that weren't answered, you can see sometimes the purpose why God didn't answer your prayer a certain way.

A: Oh yeah. Yeah. And I believe God answers every prayer. Sometimes I'm just too stupid to realize what the answer is.

C: Well, sometimes the answer's no. And I just choose to believe, based on the character of God again, that the answer's no because it's the best answer for me in that time in my life.

N: So would you say that we should be dismissive of our trials or that they're not really hard?

C: No, I think they're really hard and some of them just flat out, you know, if you lose a child, I mean, how does that pain ever go away? I don't even know that it gets easier. It just gets different. Arnie can witness on that.

A: Yeah. I think you have to embrace your problems. Overlooking them or trying to put them in the back, I know for me, one of the hardest times was when I had four months of of chemo and that was a very tough time, but I had this thing, *This is the day the Lord has made and I'm going to rejoice and be glad in it*. It's just, it's not Pollyanna kind of stuff. It's you've got a choice how you're going to face it. You've already won the battle, so get on with it.

N: I think that's really good for you guys to acknowledge.

C: Yeah. You don't know what *Paul's thorn in the flesh* is. Though I know when I was going through terrible health problems that I would always just say, Paul's thorn in the flesh. Paul and I had the same stomach problems and he would every once in a while come back and go, God, if you would take this thorn from me, that would be fantastic. And God never did. But Paul was content with that answer and there was, I'm sure purpose in it. It served me well. I mean, Paul's pain became my pain, and so I just became content in whatever my situation was. So content now to the point where I didn't ask God to take it from me because I would, I was so afraid I would lose what I was learning through that trial. As much as it stunk, it just stinks. But then I finally did ask him to take it, and you know what? He answered that prayer and then you know, you just sit by and wait for another trial, which you don't really want, but you do miss the closeness you have with God in trial. [Yep]. I do.

N: Yeah. I think that's one of the hard realities and I don't particularly like to admit it, but I think it's true. The trials of our lives put us in a place where we are dependent upon God, and that's actually a good place to be. I think when we get so focused on the things in our lives that bring us pleasure, they actually can pull us away from God if we're not careful. So those trials actually can be beneficial in our relationship with God, and I like what you guys said, it's not dismissing the reality of the trials because they are trials. They are hard, but if we're not careful, we can focus on the problems so much that the problems suck us in. I mean, it's an illustration I use with people from time to time. It's like having a quarter. A quarter is really small if you hold it in your hand, but man, if you pull that quarter right up to one of your eyes, I mean that quarter seems huge. In fact, you can't even see past it. We do the same things with our trials. We become so focused on it that it becomes reality and our eyes are off God and the problems seem so much bigger than God, so we lose confidence in God. There are probably some listeners today who are feeling overwhelmed and they're struggling and they honestly feel defeated. They need a boost in their confidence in God. What would you say to those people today who are struggling?

C: God is real. And He tells the truth.

A: Yeah. I would also say that God will never leave you or forsake you. Even though it may seem like He has, hang on to some Scripture that's God's promises and that will get you through. I guarantee it.

N: Yeah. It's just, as you guys said earlier, it's keeping our focus on truth, which is a Heavenly perspective. The battle has been won. God is faithful. He is trustworthy, therefore we can follow Him in confidence today.