

**WEDNESDAY, 4/29/20**

**SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear**

**Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)**

**Title: Shadrach, Meshah, and Abednego Pt. 3 (of 3)**

All right, let's begin today's study in Daniel Chapter 3 at Verse 19 ...

“Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup> And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup> Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.<sup>1</sup>”

The King went from level 10 of anger to level 12 and sentenced them to death. Now there are two things I want us to see here.

First, any of the three men could have acted independently of the other two and bowed down at this point. We've all had one of these moments. For example: we've all been children here, and for some of you listening today, you still act like a child! But we can all remember that time when your parents were really upset, and they said you'd better comply or else. And we said, “no!” Then our parents' eyes lit up like a fiery furnace. They breathed flames. Smoke belled out of their ears. They reached for the spanking spoon, and we said, “Just kidding! Just kidding! I give in!” Any of these 3 men could have said “Just kidding” but they didn't.

Second, they could have resisted arrest and tried to run away. They could have even struggled and resisted being thrown into the fire. But they don't. They are faithful to God in participating in the trial. This is the result of being ready. They were faithful before, in, and through the trial. So should we **be faithful**.

We know following Jesus will cost us something. Yes, salvation is the free gift of God. Yes, salvation through Christ is by grace alone through faith alone. We can't buy our way to God. We can't sweet talk our way to God. But I cannot forget Christ's words, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). For

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 3:19–21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

these 3 men, it meant being willing to give up their life. For 10 of the apostles, it meant giving up their lifestyles and literally being martyred.

Chances are in this day and age in the US, you won't be asked to do so. But as a follower of Christ, you must be willing. Our readiness lends itself to faithfulness.

I want you to think about this and answer honestly to yourself: What are you willing to give up – to sacrifice in obedience to following Christ? Maybe a better question is what *aren't* you willing to give up to follow Christ?

“Whoever wants to be my disciple should give up an afternoon of golf and occasionally follow me.” No. That's not what He said. “Whoever wants to be my buddy should probably be willing to read a verse from the Bible a day, while binge-watching *Modern Family* 2 hours a night.” No. That's not what He said.

“Whoever wants a free ticket to Heaven should maybe be willing to tithe on occasion if it doesn't interfere with your own spending habits.” No, that's not what Jesus said.

Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Even into the tests and trials? Even into the fiery furnaces? Absolutely.

Readiness does not guarantee the “positive” outcomes we expect. But we can be sure preparation, awareness, confidence in God, and faithfulness will produce the outcomes that God desires and orchestrates for a greater purpose.

### **Discussion:**

N: So we've probably just disappointed a lot of people out there. This may have challenged some people's theology, but one thing I've learned as a pastor, is that disappointing people is part of the job, especially when we default to God's Word over our own opinion. So I wanted to ask you two, Cara and Arnie, how has God worked out the trials in your life for a greater purpose?

C: In my life, trials are a good way to evangelize, which is what I feel like is my purpose. I think God gave me a heart for evangelism, but I actually had a question, that with the guys being thrown into the fire and how confident they were, they were like, “Yeah, okay; man, we might die”. Do you think they were afraid? I ask that question because I think there's people, who would think if they're not a hundred percent confident, or that if they're fearful, it might be sinful, like you don't trust God. But I feel like our Christian faith is more like John Wayne saying, “Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.” So you can be afraid or have true concern, but go forward anyway, trusting God.

N: Yeah. We have to remember that these were just human beings and they were young men.

They knew that a fiery death would be painful, though probably quicker than some because of how hot the furnace was. It doesn't matter; I'm totally confident in my future and that God has me and loves me. But you know, death is still a little scary. So I think they were probably afraid or had doubt, not in God's faithfulness or in their future, but rather the reality of, "You know what? We trust God. Here we are. We're going to be thrown into a fiery furnace and this is probably going to stink." That's human. That's not sinful. That's reality.

C: I think that's probably where people who believe this prosperity gospel get into trouble, because if something is happening to them and they're experiencing a trial, that they just don't have enough faith. And I like your answer because yeah, I'm not afraid to die. I know the outcome of that. Because of Jesus, I can walk out of that grave, but I'm not really excited to go through that process. [Right.] That there is some fear there, so, but it's not a sin. It's just part of being a human being.

N: Right, exactly. God gave us emotions and they're there for a reason. I mean that's something I struggle with sometimes as a husband, you know, managing the emotions of my own spouse. They're actually good and they're there for a reason. They're God given and they're indicative of something else.

So for these men, or for you and I today to be facing COVID-19, possible job loss, financial insecurity, health concerns of all kinds, problems at home, emotions running wild, and you're stressing and you're afraid of the many scenarios that could play out, I don't think that's necessarily sinful. I think it's managing the reality of the situation. So if you're struggling today with doubt because of the situation, join the club. I think we all are and I am still totally confident in God's faithfulness, and knowing that in the end, we have won the day, and he has my best in store. But that sure doesn't mean it's health, wealth and prosperity, and in my case, a full head of hair.

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So, again, we can be confident that preparation, awareness, confidence in God, and faithfulness will produce the outcomes that God desires and orchestrates for a greater purpose.

Like what? Let's see an example as this story concludes. Let's pick it up in Verse 25.

<sup>25</sup> He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the King's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not

harméd, and no smell of fire had come upon them. <sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the King’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” <sup>30</sup> Then the King promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup>

The three men are faithful even to the point of death. They are thrown into the fire, and God rescues them. Let me make a sobering, but an honest observation: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are the exception and not the norm. He can save us from, in, and through the tests and trials, and He may not.

Yes, we always pray with full confidence that God will heal us of cancer. Yes, we pray that the impending job loss won’t come true. Yes, we pray that our children who reject the faith will come back to God. Yes, we pray that the abusive or cheating spouse will repent and come back to our marriage. Yes, we pray that the religious persecution we can face will not destroy us. We can pray that COVID-19 won’t hurt our family. But in all things, we pray, “Amen.” In other words, in accordance with *your* will Father. I am confident in your goodness and faithfulness.

We have to remember that we are not God. He is God. All the trials, all the tests, all the fiery furnaces, all the persecution, all the pain, all the suffering. It is not meaningless, but has a purpose. One such purpose is to **Be a living testimony.**

These 3 young men were a living testimony. Their obedience led to King Nebuchadnezzar saying “, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego... There is no other god who can rescue like this!” Now, the text doesn’t say He converted. But there is no doubt their actions were a living testimony to Him.

Today you may be facing cancer. You may be facing bullying. You may be facing job loss. You may be facing death. You may be facing no money in the bank and no paycheck in sight. You may be facing a divorce. You may be facing bankruptcy. You may be facing persecution.

Friends, I promise you, it is purposeful. There is the greater purpose of bringing glory to God and being totally dependent upon Him, like these young men. But friends, it is also to be a living testimony to the people who are watching you.

Kevin Harney, in his book “Organic Outreach” he has a chapter on telling your story. Kevin writes this, “*Each week you have new stories to tell of how God is moving and working. When people hear these stories, they are faced with a profound reality. You really do believe what you say you believe – your faith is authentic. The fact that you actually know Jesus and have a*

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 3:25–30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

*dynamic relationship with the God who made you, creates interest in hearing more about your spiritual journey and the God you are following” (204-205).*

When we experience the crud of this world, the tests, the trials, the pain, the suffering, and the persecution, people are watching. They, too, experience pain, suffering, and trials. As you persevere in and through them, some people will ask, “how?” Friends, this is your chance to share your story – His story – “the Gospel” and then let the Holy Spirit do His work.

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N: So Arnie, I think it's safe to say that you haven't had a perfect life. You've had great blessings, but also great hurts and trials. How has God used those to be a living testimony to the people you know and the people you meet?

A: Yeah, man, those disappointments are really something and I think, most of my disappointments are self-inflicted, and those are very easy. You know, I look and say, ah, you're such an idiot. Okay. Some of the other disappointments though are much, much harder. And that's when you think you're doing what God wants you to do, and everything just appears to blow up, and it just makes you wonder. It makes you wonder about your calling, it makes you, it shakes you at your core. And what I've learned over time that the safest place is to be in God's will, regardless of the outcome. And as you learn over time that God's always faithful, and He always comes through, maybe not like how you thought, and maybe not because of some unconfessed sin in your life, but maybe it's just His will and you just don't simply understand. And over time, learning of God's faithfulness is so helpful in getting through any of life's disappointments that really don't make sense to you.

N: I think that's really true. You said something there, I want to pick your brain a little bit on, because I would guess some listeners probably asked the same question that I did, as you said it. How do you know God's will?

A: Boy, that's a great one. You could get my friend's book, *Os Guinness*, and read that, which is an excellent book that I read as a 47 year old as a new believer, and that really helped. Or the best thing to do is just to keep moving closer to Jesus each day, and He will show you. And that's really hard to think about and even harder to do, but that is really how you find God's will, is walking with Him daily and letting the Holy Spirit into your life, and to act on your behalf, and motivate you, and move you forward. So it is a process. And one of the things that *Os Guinness* said that has always stuck with me, and I'm kind of a type “A”, kind of a “Doer” kind of guy, is God didn't call you to *do* something - God called you to Him first. And that is a huge, huge thing, especially for those of us that are on fire for Jesus. I get into trouble when I start trying to do

things for God, when really He doesn't need me. He's just called me to Him.

N: I think one of the simplest ways of thinking about God's will for us all, is just knowing that God's will is for us to glorify Him. I think that's a great guide and standard, because we get so wrapped up in the red car, the blue car, this job or that job. And sometimes that may come down to God's will, but so often it comes down to loving Him and living a life that brings Him glory, with intentionality. Okay. So going back to the discussion, Cara, what about you? How has God used your disappointments to bring the spotlight to God's faithfulness?

C: To glorify Him. Period. What better way to tell people that you believe in God and that He's good but through a trial? So I just look at every opportunity to glorify Him. And I think people expect you to glorify God when things are going well, but it really throws nonbelievers for a loop when a tornado takes your house, and you see a believer out there going, you know what? Praise God. Praise God.

N: Absolutely. Okay. So what about deliverance? These men weren't delivered from the fiery furnace, but they were delivered out of it. A lot of people pray and say, you know, God, I don't want this trial. Get me out of it as quickly as possible. But I think the norm is we will go through it, and that's for our benefit. But there are times when God will uniquely bless us when we come out of the trial. How has God's blessing been a testimony to other people regarding your own life?

C: Well, just right now with what's going on with the COVID-19, he's revealing things about me that I need to change. One of the things that I've noticed about myself is my reliance on comfort. My husband and I were talking about his sports, how, you know, I think we have more idols than we think we have. We think idols look like the golden calf or something, but there are things that we subtly put over wanting to grow closer to Jesus, that we don't realize we have. So comfort, my reliance on comfort. It's an uncomfortable situation right now. I think mostly because we don't know when it's going to end and so patience, but I do notice this, the closer I get to God, the pickier He gets about how I see things and how I'm living my life and I love that. I love that when He tells me that I'm not perfect, and He does that almost every day, then I know that I'm in His will.

N: Wow. That's a sign of maturity right there. I don't know if I'm there yet.

C: No, I'm getting there, but I'm not there. [Okay, all right.] I'm not saying I've changed anything. [Okay]. I'm just saying it's been revealed to me that I need to make some changes.

N: Yep. It's a process for all of us, that's for sure. Arnie, what about you?

A: I think through this time and the struggles that I have, and reflecting on the Word also is a tremendous help and encouragement. And I'm not saying it theoretically; I'm saying it heartwise in preparing for this time, just going over not only God's faithfulness, but the strength that comes in being faithful, is a tremendous lesson learned. And you know, these guys, they were young, I think they say 17 or 18 years old, and you know, when you're an old guy, you can say, ah, they were just stupid kids. They didn't know to be afraid. On the other hand, it really shows that simplicity as a child, of just stepping out in faith and just going for it. So whether it's being delivered from a fiery furnace or worried about you're going to get the virus and three days later you're going to be dead, it's you've just got to live it out completely. And I think these guys were great examples of that.

N: You know, one of the ways that I've seen God use our situations, and even the blessings inside of the trials, is with our middle son. Our middle son, when he was about two months old, he was diagnosed with cancer and has been through a lot of health issues throughout his whole life. But what's neat about it, is God did not rescue him, you know, from that trial, but He's been faithful through it all. And at different points, we've had doctors say, you know, some of his healing and how he's responded is not normal. It's probably divine.

And every year, God has opened the door for our family to go to an event at the University of Nebraska called Dance Marathon, where college kids come to raise money for the Children's Miracle Network, and what's amazing is, every year they open up the floor to patients and parents of these children who are miracle kids. And every year, we get the opportunity to speak to a captive audience of 18 to 22 year olds and talk about God's faithfulness, and talk about the reality of trials and how hard that they are. However, God can give you a peace and a hope in the face of any trial or any diagnosis, no matter how grim it can be. And what's amazing is because of the willingness to share about the pain, the hurt, the disappointment, but also the hope and the faithfulness of God, people have come to Christ who would have never entertained the idea, or would have normally not ever been around a believer to hear it. So God will use our situations and our trials to bring Him glory, exactly what you talked about. And when it brings Him glory, that light is shown on Him, and people take their eyes off their situation and put it right back on God. And **that's exactly what we are called to be: a mirror that points people back to God.**

So I want to thank you guys for being honest and open about some of the things you've gone through and how you've used it, by God's grace, to engage in outreach and see people come to faith in Christ. So thank you guys for being with me today.