

There Is Another In The Fire!

1. Warm-up: Sunday's Scripture described Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's experience with the fiery furnace. Fire can be a terrifying thing. Have you ever experienced a fire emergency? What happened? How did you feel?

2. Daniel chapter 3 contains two of the Bible's great literary symbols. Understanding those symbols allows us to decode the meaning of the story and apply it to our lives. The first half of the chapter is dominated by a 90 foot golden statue of Bel (chief god of Babylon) erected by King Nebuchadnezzar. At the dedication ceremony, Nebuchadnezzar assembled a multitude of government officials and ordered them to bow down and worship the statue or else. As such, the statue represents the pressure to conform to the norms, values, and ways of the culture around us. Read the first half of this week's scripture, Daniel 3:1-18, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Imagine how hard it was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to stand when everyone around them bowed down. The psychological pressure to conform can be enormous. In the early days of TV, one of the most popular TV shows was "Candid Camera." In one episode, hidden cameras watched as an ordinary person boarded an elevator, then turned to face the front of the elevator. Then three actors boarded, but faced the rear of the elevator. At the next floor, another actor boarded and also faced the rear. By now the ordinary person was visibly uncomfortable, and he too turned to face the rear. This experiment was repeated several times during the episode with different people. Every single one of them eventually turned to face the rear. Why is that? Why does the pressure to conform have such a powerful psychological pull on us?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you've felt enormous pressure to conform. Did you yield or stand strong? How did you feel?
 - c. Romans 12:2 says, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." As followers of Jesus, we're called to be the kind of people who transform culture, rather than being transformed by it. In your view, what are some of the ways Jesus wants us to live/behave counterculturally?
 - d. Being different isn't easy. But what are some of the upsides? What are some of the downsides?
 - e. When warned to bow down or face the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But if not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:16-18. Jeff shared a story about how the reporters of an independent Russian news agency called Meduza are boldly defying Vladimir Putin's threats to imprison them and anyone

who associates with, reads, or shares links to Meduza. When in your life have you witnessed (or participated in) a bold act of sacred defiance?

3. The second half of our scripture story is dominated by a second great literary symbol, the fiery furnace. The furnace represents the fiery trials we experience in life, including things like the destruction, loss, or death of a dream, a relationship, a way of life, our health, or our life itself. Let's now read the second half of the story, Daniel 3:19-26, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The primary point of the second half to the story is that we should not fear life's fiery furnace experiences, for at least two reasons. First, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego landed in the fiery furnace, they discovered they were not alone. A fourth person was in the fire with them who looked like "a son of the gods," i.e., Jesus. Tell us about a fiery-furnace experience in your life. Did you sense a supernatural presence with you in that situation? If so, how would you describe that presence – how did you sense it, what did it feel like?
 - b. Why do you think some people sense the deep presence of God in fiery trials while others don't? Are there things we can do to increase the likelihood we will experience the deep presence of God in times of distress?
4. A second reason we not to fear fiery trials is found in Daniel 3:24, "[The king] said to his counselors, 'Was it not three men that we threw **bound** into the fire . . . ? But I see four **unbound**, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a son of the gods!'" The promise here is that, if we respond faithfully, our fiery trials have the power to set our spirit free to soar to new heights.
 - a. Think about a time of great trial in your life. In what ways were you better, stronger, or freer when you came out the other side of the trial?
 - b. Why do you think God has put us in a world where we face so many fiery trials? Why can't life be easier?
5. Jeff closed Sunday's sermon with a story about a British officer trapped at Dunkirk along with most of the Allied army during the early part of World War II when the Nazis rampaged across France. The Allied forces trapped at Dunkirk faced a choice: surrender or be annihilated. In response to a Nazis order to surrender, a British officer replied with three simple words, "But if not . . ." He was intentionally invoking the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they told Nebuchadnezzar, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. **But if not**, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:17-18. Is there a situation in your life right now where God is calling you to embrace a bold "but if not" attitude of defiance or refusal to yield? If so, are you ready to embrace that call?

The First Half of the Story: Daniel 3:1-18

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³So the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. When they were standing before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, ⁴the herald proclaimed aloud, 'You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.' ⁷Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, 'O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, ¹¹and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O king. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?'

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter. ¹⁷If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. ¹⁸But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.'

The Second Half of the Story: Daniel 3:19-26

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace to be heated up seven times more than was customary, ²⁰and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. ²²Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counsellors, 'Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?' They answered the king, 'True, O king.' ²⁵He replied, 'But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.' ²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!' So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.