

THE GOD OF DANIEL'S THREE FRIENDS

Daniel 3:1-30

Key Verses: 3:17,18

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Daniel chapter 3 is a story about King Nebuchadnezzar's dedication ceremony of an image of gold. This dedication ceremony was a national event of the Babylonian Empire, so all the kings of subject nations and their delegates, and all the nobles and high officials of Babylon, and all the men of standing and benefactors and industrialists ought to attend the ceremony. Therefore, this story should be about all these people in the upper echelon of the Babylonian Empire, who were under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. But it is not. It is a story about Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who kept their faith in God to the end and remained faithful to God. In this chapter we learn basic faith from them.

I. The dedication of an image of gold (1-18)

About 20 years before, God gave King Nebuchadnezzar a dream concerning an event that would take place in the future. After this event, God made King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom prosperous. Then King Nebuchadnezzar completely forgot about God. Again he fell into the illusion that he had made his kingdom and civilization with his own hands. Through Daniel's interpretation of the dream he had heard in the allegory of the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay, that God is Sovereign Ruler and worldly kingdoms and civilization are temporal. But King Nebuchadnezzar forgot the main point of the dream: He only remembered Daniel's word that he was the head of gold (2:38b). He was an egocentric person. In his hallucination, he made an image of gold for his own glory. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. His empire was so rich that it could afford to cast such a huge image of pure gold. But in light of the Bible stories, those who make statues of themselves are truly miserable people. For example, Saul was the first king of Israel. He was anointed by God. But he did not obey God's law. He lived for his own glory. God gave him many royal soldiers. Among them was the boy David. But King Saul was not thankful to God. Rather, he was upset and jealous of the boy David when the women of Israel praised Saul and David, singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Sa 18:7). When Saul lived for his own glory, troubles and distress followed him whatever he did (Ro 2:9). When Saul did not

realize God's grace upon his life, he was sorrowful and his life was empty. So he went to build a monument in his name. 1 Samuel 15:12b says, "There he has set up a monument in his own honor." Another man who made a monument for his own glory was Absalom, David's firstborn son. In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him (2 Sa 14:25). Once Absalom heard that his sister Tamar had been molested by one of his brothers, Amnon. Then Absalom became the slave of a revengeful spirit. Finally he felt that he was very miserable and sorrowful. So he went to the King's Valley and made a monument to the memory of his name (2 Sa 18:18).

King Nebuchadnezzar erected such an enormous, awesome image of gold for his name so that he might demonstrate his power and glory before his subjects and consolidate diplomatic relations with his subject nations and solidify his power and authority further. The demonstration of his wealth and power through the dedication ceremony of the image of gold was fantastic. But he had no God in his heart. So he did not find any absolute meaning whatever he did. He was as sorrowful as King Saul. He was as miserable as Prince Absalom. King Nebuchadnezzar was nothing but an idol worshiper. At the time of King Nebuchadnezzar's dedication ceremony for the image of gold, Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were present, since they were the governors of provinces (2:49). They were in for fiery trials because of their faith. Let's see what they did.

First, Daniel's three friends refused to bow down. The dedication ceremony was thoroughly prepared. It was glorious and spectacular. After the image of gold was set up the surrounding area was decorated by specialists from all over the provinces. High up in the center was a golden royal box where King Nebuchadnezzar and his wife were present. One stage lower were several hundred silver royal boxes for his high officials and their wives. On the third stage were several thousand bronze royal boxes for subject kings and their diplomats. Underneath were several thousand chairs lined up for all the dignitaries of all nations of all languages. In another corner were several thousand musicians with their instruments and behind them several thousand flags were standing in colorful lines. At one corner was an entrance where soldiers were ready to parade in honor of the king.

Now the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace" (4b-6). As soon as they heard the sound of the music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King

Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

But Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, stood up and did not bow down to the image of gold. They had been appointed as governors of provinces by virtue of Daniel's recommendation and they worked hard for the king. They knew they were captives from Israel. But they obtained governors' positions. Yet they loved God more than anything else in the world. When they were successful the time of faith test came to them. It was whether or not to bow down to the image of gold. At the time of fiery trial, at the time their destiny was flickering like a candle before the wind, they were not gripped with fear because they loved God in their hearts and God was with them. They were ready to obey God's command not to worship idols: They were ready to refuse the king's order to bow down to the image of gold. Their act of love reminds us of John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, had a spirit of martyrdom and it was indeed great: It enabled them to die even in the flames of fire. Their spirit of martyrdom became the power source of Christianity. Reverend Choo lived at the time of the Japanese invasion. Japanese public officials coerced all Korean Christian ministers to worship a Japanese idol (the son of the sun). But Reverend Choo never yielded to their demand. So he was arrested and tortured and imprisoned for 11 years. Finally Reverend Choo died in prison to keep his faith in God. Thus he became a good influence to his fellow Christians. When we read of heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, one thing is very clear, if they could love God, they were happy to die anytime, any moment. Hebrews 11:36-38 says, "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."

Some astrologers saw Daniel's three friends standing aloof and denounced them, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up" (12). These astrologers, who denounced them, were Daniel's friends' political rivals and opponents. They held grudges against them because the inferior race, the Jews, occupied the governorship. When they denounced them, they were sure that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would be put into the blazing furnace. They were filled with sadistic joy.

King Nebuchadnezzar knew the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The king also knew their faithfulness and achievements. The king

knew they were friends of Daniel. So he did not immediately put them into the blazing fire, but wanted to give them a second chance. So the king summoned them and said, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?" (14) He also said, "...if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to save you from my hand?" (15)

What did they answer? Look at verses 16-18. "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, 'O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'" This is their confession of faith. This is also their personal life testimony.

Second, Daniel's friends believed God's power and his love (16,17). Firstly, they believed that God is God Almighty. Not only Daniel's three friends, but also all the forefathers of faith and heroes of faith and warriors of faith in history believed that God is Almighty God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego believed their God is Almighty God. So they said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it." We also must have this basic faith, which is the first step of faith. We must believe that God created heaven and earth with his power and wisdom (Gen 1:1). God made the heavens where there are multi-millions of stars (Gen 1:17). God made the sea where there are multi-millions of fish, enough to feed all mankind to the end (Gen 1:20). The people of Israel had this faith in God Almighty. They believed that God enabled them to make a great Exodus from Egypt (Ex 15:2; Ps 105:37). They believed that God enabled them to cross the Red Sea as on dry land (Ex 15:8; Ps 106:9). They believed that God made Aaron's dried rod sprout, bud and blossom (Num 17:8). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had this faith.

Secondly, they believed that God is love (18). Look at verse 18. "But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Because they loved God, they did not care whether or not they died. They loved God with all their hearts. There is no doubt in their testimonies whether God would save or not. They didn't mind whether God saved them or not. What mattered was whether they loved God or not. They loved God. Their faith in God's love reminds us of Romans 8:38,39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Their faith in God's power and love also reminds us of the beautiful life of Joseph. They were happy to die

in blazing flames of fire because they loved God. If only they could love God Almighty they were happy to die at any moment. They believed that God loved them and they loved God as a matter of life and death.

II. Daniel's friends were thrown into the fire (19-30)

First, Nebuchadnezzar threw them into the fire (19-23). King Nebuchadnezzar was furious because of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. By their confession of love the king's pride was offended. To the king, what they said was nothing but treason and rebellion and disobedience to the king's command, and their testimony shamed King Nebuchadnezzar for the first time in his lifetime. So the king ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. Out of his anger, King Nebuchadnezzar decided to throw them into the blazing furnace. The decision made out of anger brought them disaster. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Second, the fourth man. After throwing Daniel's three friends into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar thought they were burned to ashes. But when God was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they did not die in the flaming fire of the furnace. Only the ropes of the king burned like bits of straw. And they were freed from bondage. When God was with them they could rejoice in God and danced in the flaming fire. Where there is God, there is the Kingdom of God. King Nebuchadnezzar saw that they did not die but were dancing, so the king leaped to his feet in amazement. When he carefully saw them, four men, not three men, were walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth man looked like a son of the gods (25). Here, the fourth man is God in the form of an angel. When Daniel's three friends believed God's almighty power and his love, God came down and was with them in the flaming fire.

What did Nebuchadnezzar do? Nebuchadnezzar approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" (26) So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire and all the officials saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them (27).

Third, King Nebuchadnezzar praises God (28-30). "Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God' (28). The king issued a decree

that the people of any language or nation who said anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way (29). King Nebuchadnezzar also promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. But King Nebuchadnezzar's blindness was that he did not accept God as his personal God, even though he had experienced the presence of God two times. He saw God as the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So King Nebuchadnezzar could not see the kingdom of God. He only remained as a spiritually blind man.

Daniel chapter 3 contrasts worldly men with men of God. Worldly men look great but they are always miserable and sorrowful because they have no God. The men of God seem to have no fun, but they are truly happy because they have God and God is with them as their Everlasting Father. May God help us to love God and live as his people.