

Read Daniel 3:1-30

The fiery furnace of Daniel's time was a hole in the ground, large enough for three men to be thrown into, and large enough for them to stand upright and walk around. This furnace could have been used for the refining of gold or silver. And, considering the evil of the Babylonian kingdom, it was used for a very cruel end for those who would defy the king. God calls Egypt an iron furnace, from which he delivers his people: "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day" (Deut. 4:20). God calls our afflictions a furnace in his hands. This the Lord does, not as Nebuchadnezzar did because he wouldn't be obeyed, but for his own glory: "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it; for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:10-11). This is God taking ordinary people and making them extraordinary.

Raise your hand if you are a huge fan of crime and mystery stories. Did you ever read the Hardy Boys novels? Today, I love TV shows like CSI and BONES. Are you good at pointing out the culprit without reading or knowing the rest of the story?

Sometimes I am right. But most of the time, I am way off.

I must admit that despite all of my futile attempts of becoming the next Sherlock Holmes, there remains one mystery that I have yet to solve. No matter how many times I try, I have yet to put all the pieces together. I hope together we can do so on today.

I'm sure you will agree that story and life of **Daniel** is a remarkable one. At the young age of 14 or 15 that Daniel, along with his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were summoned by King Nebuchadnezzar (the ruler of Babylon) to serve in his palace. *(You may recognize Daniel's friends by some other names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego)*

According to the first chapter of Daniel, these four boys were wise and gifted beyond their years, and Daniel was the rarest of them all, because of his ability to interpret visions and dreams. After impressing King Nebuchadnezzar with their knowledge and faith in the Lord, all four were promoted by the king to govern over the affairs of Babylon. But Daniel, was given an even higher position as a **ruler** who sat at the very gate of the king (see Daniel 2:46-49).

And this is where it gets interesting.

In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar sent out a word to ALL of those who ruled under him to gather to dedicate a special golden image he had created. A decree went out to every governor, judge, and high ranking official serving within his kingdom, that at the sound of music, everyone would have to bow and worship the image he had created. **EVERYONE.**

The penalty for anyone who did not bow was death courtesy of a fiery furnace, not exactly the most pleasant of executions. So when the music was cued, every governor, judge, and high ranking official that was called to gather bowed before the image. Except for three.

Not four. **But three.**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow, but to rather stand on **FAITH** against the king. The penalty of their actions caused them to be thrown into the fiery furnace. Yet to the surprise of the king and all who gathered around to see them executed, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were not being consumed by the fire. In fact, they were joined by another person: **the Son of God!**

Now this is the part of the story where most people jump to their feet and cheer. But it is here where the mystery begins. Have you ever stopped to wonder...**where was Daniel?**

Why were there only three that defied the king's orders, and not four? The decree called for EVERYONE to be present. The whereabouts of Daniel remain a mystery. Is it possible that our beloved young Daniel, surrounded by the pressures of life and his newly appointed position, took a bow for the first time in his life? The Bible doesn't say that Daniel did this. It doesn't even allude to it. Daniel certainly stood up for the Lord in his lifetime, but it gets you thinking.

I'm sure if he did bow down, then it would have been mentioned. After all, when other leaders in the Bible strayed from the Lord, it was recorded. Nothing critical is ever said so it's unlikely that he bowed down and worshipped the statue. And since he had really embarrassed the other "wise men" in the King's court by being the only one who could interpret his dream, it's also hard to believe that they would let him get away with disobeying the King's command.

Daniel and the King of Babylon had developed a special relationship starting from the time he had interpreted the King's dream. It was at Daniel's suggestion that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given positions of responsibility (**Daniel 2:49**). He was their benefactor and like them had remained faithful to his covenant with God. Yet he appears nowhere in this story.

The only plausible explanation is that Daniel had gone away during this time, and perhaps it was his absence that gave the others the courage to report Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for their non-compliance.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had the chance to stand up for the Lord in the absence of their friend Daniel.

QUESTIONS

1. **God used ordinary boys to do extraordinary things. Do you think God can use ordinary you to do extraordinary things?**
2. **What does it take to move from ordinary to extraordinary?**
3. **What does the Word say happened to the young boys for taking the assignment?**
4. **What was the overall outcome of the boy's courage to become extraordinary?**

It takes faith and trust in the Holy Spirit to do extraordinary things.

Where is the **FAITH** you once had in your workplace? Where is the **FAITH** you once had in your marriage? Or what about the **FAITH** in God you once could not stop sharing with others, that now has been minimized to just an invitation for people to visit your church?

Daniel...where are you? We never saw Daniel NOT follow the Lord, so we have to believe that he was just away during that time.

We shouldn't be people who bow out of what God has promised us. No matter what the obstacles may look like, know that God will deliver you.

QUESTIONS

1. What "ordinary" situations has God placed you in? (i.e. job, school, marriage, hobbies)
2. What "extra" does God want you to put in that "ordinary" situation?
3. Is everything "ordinary" without the activity of the Holy Spirit?
4. Like the three young boys of Daniel 3, what is God calling you to "stand up for"?
5. Unlike the three young boys, what have you been bowing down to that keeps you from being extraordinary?

Daniel DID follow the Lord. When he heard the decree of not praying to anyone but Nebuckadnezzar (Daniel 6:10-17, he immediately goes home and purposefully disobeys it! Not because he's a rebel... Far from it. But God came first in his life and there was nothing that he would let come before his relationship with the Lord. Note also that he doesn't go home to moan at God about his predicament... no, he kneels and gives thanks to God! He also asks God for His help. Remember that Daniel was in his early eighties at this stage. He was an man with a lifetime of experiencing the faithfulness of his Lord. Because of this, Daniel wasn't freaked out easily! D.L. Moody said that 'character is what you are in the dark.' Daniel's strength lay in the Lord and who he was when no one was looking was who he was in public. He is unshakeable because of the firm foundation beneath him that held him up... and that is the Lord!

But caught red handed he was none the less, practicing that oh so terrible crime of praying to God. The trap had been sprung and although the king now realized that he had now been tricked, there was nothing that he could do about it. A decree was a decree and it must be acted upon!

Daniel 6:18-23

Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

The king was obviously really concerned for Daniel, and, as someone has said, fasted for the night hoping the lions would do likewise! There is a very real sense in which this is a picture for us. The New Testament tells us that '*your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.*' We, like Daniel, need to remain strong in our faith in the midst of our

difficulties. It is also important to not give the enemy reason to justifiably condemn us. We read above that Daniel was delivered from the lion because 1) He was innocent in the matter and 2) He trusted in his God. As Psalm 34:7 tells us '*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*' Paul experienced this (well, many, many times) and no doubt drawing upon the Biblical imagery of Daniel 6 wrote '*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.*' (2 Tim 4:17)

God can shut the lion's mouth, in whatever form it comes. Stand firm in your faith.

Daniel 6:24-28

*At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. **Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land:***

*"May you prosper greatly! "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom **people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.***

*"For he is **the living God** and he **endures forever**; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.*

***He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.**
He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."*

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

QUESTIONS

1. When the Devil tries to throw the ordinary way of living in your life (giving up, settling, complaining, etc.), what do you do?
2. What "lion's mouths" do you need shut in your life?
3. Daniel stood up for the Lord knowing full well the lions were coming. Are you willing to be extraordinary for God, stand up for Him, regardless of the world's consequences?
4. What is the fruit (John 15) that comes from standing up for the Lord? What did God do for Daniel?

Notes from the weekend message are below.....

Isaiah 66:2 NKJV

For all those *things* My hand has made,
And all those *things* exist,"
Says the LORD.

" But on this *one* will I look:
On *him who is poor* and of a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My word.

2 Chronicles 16:9 NKJV

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.”

1 Samuel 16:7 NKJV

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

QUESTIONS

“Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit?”

“Are you willing to believe that the gift of the Spirit is able to effectively witness through your life?”

It’s not what you can do **FOR HIM** It’s what you can do **WITH HIM**.

QUESTIONS

“What is your assignment?”

“Why was the Holy Spirit sent to you?”

“What is He doing in your life?”

“How do we keep in step with Him and enjoy abundant life?”

EQUIPPING always follows **ASSIGNMENT**.

ENABLING power of the Holy Spirit follows **ASSIGNMENT**.

QUESTION

*“Have you noticed the **GREAT COMMANDMENT** was given before the **GREAT COMMISSION**?”*

Matthew 22:37-38 NKJV

Jesus said to him, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” This is *the* first and great commandment.

Matthew 28:19-20 NKJV

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

QUESTIONS

“Are you ready for God to reveal His assignment in your life?”

“Are you prepared to say ‘yes’ before you know what the assignment is?”

Daniel 3:17 NKJV

If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king.

John 15:7-8 NKJV

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.