

Introduction:

1. It is one of the greatest testing stories of all time.
 - a. There are numerous incidents, both in and out of the Bible, where followers of God have had their faith tested. If you are a follower of God, you have had your faith tested.
 - b. But this account is of a testing to the very greatest extreme. It was literally a do or die case!
2. It is a story of young boys who were taken away from their homeland and families. They are in a foreign land with strange and exotic practices. They are presented with something that conscience and conviction will not allow them to participate in.
 - a. The boys stand firm, trusting that their God will save them. But they are told that it is hopeless, that no god can save them from the terrible fate that awaits them.
 - b. They are to be burned alive—unless...unless—they bow down in obedience to the government and become idolaters. The government commanded everyone to worship idols. These boys would not. The boys were tied up and thrown into a roaring fire!

The Lesson:

I. The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.

- A. These boys are found in the book of Daniel.
 1. They were among the first captives taken to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar captured the city of Jerusalem, Daniel 1:1-2a, 6-7.
 2. These young men were appointed as servants to the king of Babylon. After passing an early—and easy—test of faith, these young men prospered in Babylon. And, even though they were captives in a foreign land, they did well, rising up in position in the king's court.
- B. But then it happened.
 1. This time it was no small test of faith. Nearly anyone can handle the small test. The pressure is not great. We can make it through those days. This was something far greater.
 2. King Nebuchadnezzar, his power having gone to his head, built a gigantic idol in the plain of Dura in Babylon and commanded that everyone worship the idol, Daniel 3:1-5.
 3. But the problem wasn't just that everyone was required to worship the idol. It was the penalty attached if they did not worship it. What—a ten shekel fine? Or, a week in the guard house? No! Anyone who did not worship the idol would be burned to death, Daniel 3:6.
 4. And so, all the people fell down and worshipped the idol, Daniel 3:7. All the people worshipped the idol—except these three young boys, Daniel 3:12.
 5. When Nebuchadnezzar heard this, he was hot, Daniel 3:13-15. He put it to them in no uncertain terms. It was *bow or burn!* That's why we said this is no small test of faith.
- C. So, what are these three boys to do?

II. Why not bow to the great image?

- A. What would you do if you were faced with this choice?
 1. This isn't exactly like standing up in science class and saying you reject evolution. While we don't minimize that and are glad that young followers of God have the courage to stand up for what is right, the consequences of such a stand are small by comparison.
 2. This isn't exactly like refusing to take a drink when all the other kids are passing the bottle around. It is good, commendable and courageous when young people take a stand against alcohol—and they may suffer ridicule for it—but it's not quite the same.
 3. No one ever threatened to burn you alive because you speak up and point out the flaws of evolution; no one ever threatened to throw you into the fire because you would not drink.
 4. These boys are threatened with the ultimate. They will be put to death if they do not bow to the idol. Nebuchadnezzar's order to *bow or burn* is not an idle threat! He means it.
- B. Since the penalty is so severe, maybe the boys should give in. There are reasons to do that.
 1. One might have said, "It is pointless to resist the king."
 - a. Indeed, the king is powerful. He can do what he says. And it has always been a principle of God that followers of God should obey the government.
 - b. But, not in this case—not when it conflicts with God. Remember Acts 5:29.
 2. Another might have said, "But everyone else is bowing to the image."

- a. We don't like to be odd man out when everyone else is doing something, do we?
- b. But if, in fact, *everyone* is doing something, that doesn't make it right. Where was *everyone* in the time of Noah's flood? Where was *everyone* when Jesus was on trial? Where will *everyone* be on the Judgment Day? Remember Matthew 13-14.
3. One might have said, "But, if we do it, it will give us a chance for advancement."
 - a. Isn't it true that God wants his people to succeed, to advance and influence others?
 - b. Yes, but not at this cost. No advancement in the world is worth giving up your conviction about right and wrong. All such advancement is temporary, Psalm 73:2-3, 16-19.
4. Someone might have reasoned, "The idol is nothing; it's just a symbol."
 - a. Indeed, it is just a symbol, not a real god. Is it OK to bow with "mental reservation"?
 - b. But, just a symbol of what? Of evil and a rejection of the true God, Exodus 20:2-5. Sin committed with "mental reservation" is still sin, Revelation 21:8.
5. Another could have said, "We will just do it once, and not for long."
 - a. Committing a sin one time is not like doing it for a lifetime. Do it once and it's over.
 - b. People who are willing to compromise and do it once show a flaw within their hearts. What other sins are we willing to compromise on and do once? Does just one murder make me less a murderer? One act of idolatry makes me an idolater, 1 John 5:20-21.
6. It might have been argued, "We will do more good by living than by dying."
 - a. Certainly God wants his people to do good. He wants *us* to do good, Matthew 5:16.
 - b. But do we do evil in order that good may come? We do not, Romans 3:8. What good can the boys really do if they show others that they are willing to compromise and practice idolatry?
7. One might have said, "The fiery furnace is too great a sacrifice."
 - a. And there is no question that it was a sacrifice, a really big sacrifice.
 - b. But was it too big a sacrifice when Moses gave up what he had in Egypt? Was it too great a sacrifice when Esther was willing to die to save her nation? Was it too great a sacrifice when Jesus went to the cross to save us from our sins? What people are looking for is a sacrifice that costs nothing. That's not sacrifice, 2 Samuel 24:22-24.
8. These are just some of the arguments that might have been offered to save these boys from being burned alive. But none of them would do. These boys had another plan. Indeed, God had another plan.
- C. Their answer to the king, Daniel 3:16-18. The substance of their answer was this: "We bow to God alone—never to idols." There is a God—our God—who delivers. He will deliver us."
 1. Notice that their answer is not conditional. They do not say, "We believe our God will deliver us. But if it starts getting hot and it looks like He is not going to help us, well, then we will bow to the idol." Nothing like that! They answer with firm resolve.
 2. These young boys know who God is. It is not just that they know He is great and powerful and can deliver. It is that they know He must never be slighted and that He must never be pushed aside to worship idols. He is the great, mighty, majestic, awesome and only God!

III. The end of the story.

- A. And so, angry, raging King Nebuchadnezzar threw them into the fire, Daniel 3:19-25. And, just as the boys had trusted, God sent an angel to deliver them.
- B. Did the boys learn anything that day? Maybe not. I think they were just acting on what they already knew. It was Nebuchadnezzar who learned something that day, Daniel 3:26-30. He learned about the true God. (And, by the way, notice that the boys were promoted!)
- C. The real question for us is this: Can we learn anything from what happened on that day? Can we learn that we must never compromise our faith—with idolatry, alcohol, drugs, immoral sex, abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, or on anything that God says is sin?

Conclusion:

1. Faithfulness (Revelation 2:10) isn't just about coming to all the services and never quitting on the Lord. It is about standing for God's cause no matter the consequences—even in the face of death.
2. Have you taken a stand for God's cause? Have you been forgiven of your sins? I would like to meet those three boys some day. Would you like to meet them? They will be in heaven. Will you?