

STAND: When The Heat Is On

Daniel 3

We are taking a whirlwind tour through some of the stories of Daniel this summer - learning about 4 young men who are in an impossible situation as prisoners of war in a foreign land - but in the midst of it all they STAND.

Many years ago (about 1984) there was a movie with Eddie Murphy called Beverly Hills Cop. The theme song for that movie was by Glenn Frey from the Eagles and was called “The Heat is On”. It became one of the biggest hits of the decade.

The heat is on, on the street
Inside your head, on every beat
And the beat's so loud, deep inside
The pressure's high, just to stay alive
'Cause the heat is on¹

Ever felt like that? I bet Daniel’s 3 friends – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - would say they were feeling the heat in their confrontation with King Nebuchadnezzar.

We’ve been hearing about King Nebuchadnezzar over the past couple of weeks – he was the most powerful man in the world in his day and with that power came a big ego. So big, he had a 90 foot statue of himself build and demanded that everyone bow down and worship him. It wasn’t enough to be king, he wanted to be a god and have everyone worship him. Anyone who didn’t was to be thrown into a fiery furnace.

When the music played, everyone did bow down and worship king Neb, everyone except the 3 amigos. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused because it was idolatry.

Idolatry is anything we value as more important than God. And it’s still a problem today. The world creates larger than life images for us to worship - Movie screens, sports stadiums, concerts, the internet are all filled with images for us to worship. Beauty, sex, pleasure, fame, power, influence - these too are idols, things we

value more than God. Sometimes we even create idols of ourselves building up our image, trying to be somebody we're not in order to impress others. There are even people who idolize themselves thinking the whole world revolves around them - you should adjust to my schedule, meet my needs, etc.

Anything that is first place in your life that isn't God – business, spouse, boyfriend, making money, having fun – nothing wrong with these things but should be further down the list. Whatever you think about most in life is what you love the most and is your god.

The 3 amigos refused to bow down to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar because it was breaking the first commandment plus it's the reason they are in Babylon in the first place – the nation was destroyed because they were not keeping God first in their lives.

Well, King Neb was outraged at their defiance. He ordered them brought before him and said I'll give you one more chance but if you refuse you'll be thrown into the furnace and then what god will be able to recuse from MY POWER.

The 3 amigos simply told King Nebuchadnezzar we don't need to defend ourselves in this matter – God doesn't need us to defend him either. We're not going to dignify your last question. Our God has the power to save us but even if he chooses not to, you can be sure we're not going to worship you.

Isn't that a powerful statement? We **know** our God *can* save us, we just don't know if he will, if it is his plan. We trust in our God - who rescued his people from Egypt through the Red Sea, who sent hordes of Midians running at the hand of Gideon, who rescued Jerusalem from Assyrian soldiers in the days of Hezekiah – this is our God , this is the God in whom we trust and he is certainly powerful enough to keep three men alive if he so chooses.

I heard a story this week about a pastor who was held at gun point by a military officer (I can't remember what country this was), he

was told that he had to quite preaching about Jesus or face death. The pastor calmly told the officer that was fine with him because he wasn't going to stop telling others about Jesus and if he died he would be with Jesus in eternal glory.

That's a powerful statement of faith, much like the 3 amigos, and it has been challenging me all week to think about how I might have responded in that situation. As we consider the situation of that pastor and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, it is good for us to consider how will we respond when the heat is on?

You might be thinking, come on pastor, we live in the USA where we have freedom of religion, we don't really have to worry about persecution or insults because of our faith.

There is some truth to that but do we really live in that good of a society? Or have we grown so use to conforming to this world that we don't even realize how often we compromise our faith to avoid bad feelings or insults or ridicule? Is fitting in OR is confessing Jesus more important in the way you speak and act as you make life's choices?

How many of your choices are made because you're afraid of not fitting in?

- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so we don't pray if others might see us at school or out in public?
- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so we steer away from mentioning Jesus when among friends who believe differently?
- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so we join the gossip or drink one more even though we've had enough?
- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so we don't participate in Bible study afraid of being called a Jesus freak or feeling uncomfortable if we did?
- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so although we say that worship is important we don't want it to take away from work or family time?

- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so spending to keep our status in the community is a higher priority than supporting the Lord's work?
- Are we afraid of not fitting in, so we settle for being lukewarm Christians? If we're lukewarm Christians we don't need to be afraid of standing alone as everyone else bows down to the gods of this age. For lukewarm Christians bow with them, rationalizing that in their hearts they still believe.

Whatever happened to fearing, loving, and trusting God above all?ⁱⁱ That's the first commandment in case you've forgotten. When we are obedient to this commandment, when we keep God front and center and in our lives and put our relationship with God above all else, we have faith to stand even in the face of ridicule, insult or persecution. When we keep God first we have the confidence to trust God's merciful power even when the heat is on.

I want you to notice three things from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's experience in the fiery furnace.

1. God is with us. When King Neb looked into the fiery furnace he notice 4 people walking around – one that looked like a Son of God. Despite the fact Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the furnace for their faith, they were not abandoned by God.

God said through the prophet Isaiah, *“When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames **will not** consume you! For I am the Lord, your God!”* Isaiah 43:2-3a (NLT)

Deuteronomy 31:6: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (NIV)

Jesus' final words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: *“And remember I am with you always.”* Mt 28:20

When the heat is on, we can trust that our God is with us.

2. God will use the fiery trial to burn off everything tying me down. The three men had been tied up before they were thrown into the furnace and yet when King Nebuchadnezzar looks into the furnace they are walking around, the ties that bound them gone.

What's holding you back? What are the limitations in your life? When God brings us through the fiery trials they get burned off and our character is refined. God burns off the stuff in our lives that is holding us back. The Bible calls this a refining fire. *“I have refined you but not in the way silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.”* Isaiah 48:10 (NLT)

Paul writes in Romans 5:3-4: *“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”*

God uses the fiery trails in our lives to burn off all that is tying us down, to purify us, to strengthen us and to shape us.

3. It will bring unbelievers to God. How you handle pain, how much you trust God when you are in pain, when the heat is on will probably be your most powerful testimony in your life. You're not much of a witness when everything is going good. But when you're in the fire people wonder “how are they doing that”? And it gives you an opportunity to witness. Don't waste a hurt – use it for God's glory.ⁱⁱⁱ

“The officers, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They 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. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, [wait, where did that come from? A pagan king recognizing God?] who has sent his angel and rescued

his servants! They trusted in him [I want that on my tombstone. That's the highest compliment. They trusted in him. That's why they are coming out unharmed.] *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. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say 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.*" Daniel 3:27-30

There is no other god who can save like this!' Isn't that a powerful statement by a pagan king all because of the witness, the testimony of these 3 men.

Who are you looking to to save you? Are you trying to save yourself? Looking for the government to save you? Are you looking for popular culture, some reality show to save you? There is no other god – that's why we have Christmas and Easter. There is no way you are getting to heaven without a savior. There is no other god.

If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9c. Jesus is the one who saves us. Jesus is the one who died so our sins could be forgiven, who rose from the dead so we could have the promise of eternal life in glory, who is with us always and gives us the courage, the confidence to stand for our faith even when the heat is on.

ⁱ Songwriters: Harold Faltermeyer / Keith Forsey The Heat Is On lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

https://www.google.com/search?site=&source=hp&q=the+heat+is+on+lyrics&oq=The+heat+is+on+ly&gs_l=psy-ab.3.0.35i39k1j0l3.618.2226.0.3395.18.7.0.0.0.0.507.1746.2j2j1j0j1j1.7.0....1.1.64.psy-ab..11.7.1744.0..0i131k1.HeYlaYQaGEO

ii Bitter, Greg. “Serve Only the God Who Can Serve.”

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/serve-only-the-god-who-can-save-gregg-bitter-sermon-on-commandments-no-gods-154997?ref=SermonSerps>

iii Warren, Rick. “When the Heat is On.”

<http://saddleback.com/watch/media/when-the-heat-is-on>