



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

October 27, 2024 – Reformation Sunday Life a Life of Courageous Witness On Fire for Jesus!

Daniel 3:16-28

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does 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.” ¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.” ²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” ²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, 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. ²⁸ 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.

1. What does it mean to be “on fire” for something? Tell the group what it is that you’re on fire for. **Typically, we use this phrase to talk about something we’re passionate about. The question is designed to help members of a Life Group to get to know each other a little better.**

Personally, I get to this time of the year and find myself “on fire” for the Packers. That means I spend some time each week following news about my team. I listen to a couple of podcasts. I read a blog or two. It's appropriate to talk about the kind of time we devote to the things that make an eternal difference in our lives – God’s Word, time spent in prayer, etc. The purpose is not to shame anyone into action, but to put things into a proper perspective. Where I’m lacking, I can, by God’s grace, recommit myself to spending more time with the Savior during the week. It certainly helps to be accountable to one another in this endeavor. Our fellow Life Group members can help in this way. I have really appreciated reading through sections of Scripture with my Mount Olive family in the YouVersion Bible app.

2. “Live like there’s no tomorrow.” “Live like you’ll live forever.” Agree or disagree and why? These two phrases are saying the same thing. I could agree with the statement if I understand “no tomorrow” to mean that Jesus is coming back at any time to take me with him to heaven. If that’s the case, the two statements could be understood in a similar way. However, a common understanding of the phrase is to set thoughts of tomorrow aside and do what you want to do today. This is often a self-centered approach to life. It reminds me of the old Epicurean philosophy: “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Live like you’ll live forever is exactly the opposite of self-centeredness. Living like you’ll live forever is living for the One who has given you eternal life. This is a life of gratitude that seeks to thank Jesus by pursuing his mission today – reaching out with the gospel and so glorifying his name. This is a life that seeks to serve fellow sinners by teaching them to know their Savior from sin. The first sentence is about self. The second is about Jesus and the people he died for.
3. As officials in the king’s government, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego must have been aware of the king’s plans for his 90-foot golden statue. Imagine how they must have “sweated” over the decision that lay ahead of them. Relate a time from your own life when you knew a “day of reckoning” was coming – a time when you would need to stand with Jesus or disown him. How did you feel? What did you do to prepare yourself for what lay ahead? *I hope that this question will spark some interesting discussion. I can only imagine some of the pressures brought to bear on our brothers and sisters in Christ. My own story takes me back to my long-time (7 years) summer job on the city crew of my hometown. I was the city park department. I worked with men who knew I was studying to be a pastor. At first they took every*

opportunity to tease and embarrass me – from lewd pictures hung in the breakroom to talk on the job that was meant to make me blush. At first, I dreaded each day of work. In some ways, my approach to the situation wasn't all that different from the three men in the text. I didn't preach at the guys. I simply chose not to join in with them. I didn't sit in the break room. I didn't adopt their language. Instead, I tried to work hard, and as I had opportunity, befriend the men. Over time, I had a chance to share Christ with each of the men. In fact, unbeknown to the others, each man sought out counsel and guidance in connection with challenges they were facing. All these fellows became so important to me through those years and beyond.

4. What reasons might the three men in our text have offered as to why it would be ok for them to bow down to the king's gods? What reasons do we sometimes offer as to why this is not the time or place to give a clear, courageous witness to God's Word and will? Why do these excuses carry no weight before God? I offered a few excuses for the three men in the sermon. Bowing down to an idol would seem like such a small and simple thing to do for men who were in powerful positions to help their fellow Israelites living in captivity. They could have easily come to the thought that God would understand their decision to safeguard their earthly lives. They must have been worth more to God alive than dead. I have never faced a life or death decision like theirs. But I have often talked myself out of standing with Christ. It is often for fear of embarrassment, fear of upsetting someone, fear of being mocked, fear of being disliked. I've told myself, "This isn't the time or place." That, of course, may have been true. But sadly I often failed to find a better time and place. There can be a fine line between being winsome in my witness and excusing my fear and failure. None of these excuses carry weight with God because his law is unchanging and irrevocable. He demands that I fear, love and trust him above all things. To choose comfort over courageous witness is nothing short of idolatry. My case, rather than bowing down to a 90-foot gold statue, I often choose to bow down to my 90-foot ego. Thanks be to God that Jesus has paid for this and all my sin!
5. Agree or disagree and why? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego put us to shame. Agree. Their example of courageous witness shames me when I think of all the times I have failed to stand with Jesus and his Word with far less at stake than my life. Those men were willing to die rather than deny God. I can also disagree with this statement. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego point me to Jesus who has done

away with my shame by claiming it as his own and suffering for it as my Substitute. When I think of their testimony, I find comfort in the promises of the Christ to which they were clinging.

6. How does the knowledge that we are forever alive in Christ inspire us to be bold and courageous witnesses? What does it mean when we still fail to stand up for him? Knowing we'll be alive forever frees us from the inhibitions that may keep us from sharing the gospel. When we take an eternal perspective, we won't worry about what people think of us right now. The only thing that matters is their well-being. We might liken it to the person who sees that his neighbor's house is on fire in the middle of the night. He doesn't let the thought that they might get upset at him for waking them up, stop him from banging on their door or breaking a window to get them out to safety. Their safety is all that matters. Eternal safety is all that matters to people who know that the last day will either bring people to eternal life or eternal death. When I fail to stand up for Jesus, I take my comfort from the fact that the life he won for me comes through the free and full forgiveness of my sins. Thanks to Jesus, God doesn't keep track of my failures. In fact, thanks to Jesus, God doesn't see me as a failure ever. He sees me as he sees Jesus – his perfect son. That's because the faith that he has worked in me claims both Christ's perfection and his sin-payment as my very own. In this forgiveness, I find new motivation each day. I get to live anew. The past is gone with its failures. Today I can watch for the opportunities that God places in my life to live as his courageous witness. Because God's grace in Christ is unending, tomorrow will be another "new start," and the day after that, and the next, until finally I'm with Jesus in heaven!
7. God did not spare Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the horror of being tossed into the king's blazing furnace, but he brought them through the experience in such a way that they didn't even smell like smoke. How does this truth embolden us to live our faith? I spoke of life's trials as "flames of a different kind." As we live a life of courageous witness, as we live "on fire for Jesus," we'll find plenty of challenges and setbacks. People may ridicule us. They may mock us and dislike us. What a comfort to know that Jesus is with us. If he's for us, no one can be against us. He will never leave or forsake us. In fact, he will be with us to turn the ridicule, mocking, and all unpleasantness into a blessing. I will come through any trials "unharmd" in every way that matters most. This emboldens me to "stay at it."

8. What impact may our bold witness have on the unbelievers around us? I mentioned in the sermon that even as Jesus is busy working his blessings in our lives, he may very well be using our undaunted spirit to bring blessing to the people who are causing us trouble. You see this in King Nebuchadnezzar. I have no idea if he became a believer, but it's very clear in the text that what the three men endured for the Name of their God, gave the king pause. He praised the Most High God for delivering his servants. God still works this way today. How many mockers, down through the centuries of time, have become followers of Christ through the patient, and sometimes pain-filled witness of God's people. (If there is time, perhaps a member of the group could share an account of someone who came to know Jesus through patient and persistent witnessing.)

9. Memorize Isaiah 43:2 "When you walk through the fire, I will be with you, the flames will not set you ablaze." How can this passage help you navigate the week ahead? This passage is a great summary of the truths of this week's sermon. I sometimes wonder if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thinking about this very passage as they came to their decision to stay standing and as they testified to the king about their God's promises and protection. The week ahead, like all the weeks I've lived so far, will have some fire and flames in it. God will bring me through all of them one way or another. Either I will be safe in his care here on earth or I'll be safe with him in heaven. Believing this allows me to approach the week ahead and the opportunities I may have as a witness with confidence and boldness. God's promises cannot fail!