

But If Not

Harmony M.B.C., February 22, 2009 (Morning)

Robert P. Myers

Daniel 3:14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said unto them, *Is it true*, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Daniel 3:15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; *well*: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who *is* that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

Daniel 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter.

Daniel 3:17 If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king.

Daniel 3:18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

God has given us the account of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego as an eternal testimony about the forces of the world that operate to tear down the confidence of believers in their Lord's eternal intent to do them good. On earth, God's people face every day some kind of threat that can be represented by what we see going on with these three believers in our text. And every day, the Lord's people have to take a stand against those forces. We have to take a stand and act out our trust in the Lord. If we do not, we find ourselves compromised by those forces and our Christian testimony gets marred and weak. We lose spiritual ground and suffer our own pangs of regret for it.

In these experiences and trials that we can see patterned in this biblical account, we see a process that reveals itself every time a child of God fights the fight of faith, resists the forces that seek to discourage and defeat, and discovers a victory in the contest. I want us to look at that process and see if we can't find something to take home with us that will strengthen and encourage us to continue to be faithful warriors for the Lord.

I. The Forces Opposing Faith and Confidence Emerge

- The things that seek to provoke us to compromise do not always present an attractive face (contrast briefly with those temptations that come in the form of allurements which lead believers to become worldly and weak)
 - > The threat of Pharaoh's wrath was certainly an ugly face of power...a dread to Moses (who knew how much power Pharaoh had)
 - > It was the threat of exposure and being singled out that caused Peter to voice his great denial

- Being detained or driven by forces of the world system can be daunting (here, suddenly, these 3 believers found themselves before the most powerful kingdom in the

civilized world at that time)

- > Some of the most trying or threatening things to our peace and confidence in the Lord come from circumstances that arise in which we are suddenly confronted with temporal forces that seem to snatch us up and carry us along like chips of wood in a flooded creek.

- > I knew this family whose son had a hard time managing money. When he had a job he didn't spend his money wisely. He would run out of money, run out of groceries. When he did that, he would show up at his parent's house to eat off of them all weekend. It seemed like every time he did this was the very weekend they had bought their own groceries with what little money they had, and he would come in and spend the weekend eating up their groceries. They didn't feel like they could say "no," but they were forced into a corner by circumstances that left them seemingly defenseless. This is the way temporal forces seem to sometimes take us where we don't want to go and we really have no control over them.

- Duress (constraint by threat) acts as a strong persuader against resolve
 - > The cliché statement "he twisted my arm behind my back" expresses the process well
 - > These three men were suddenly under severe threat by the king
 - Sometimes, life circumstances or God's providence find us in a place where we are greatly threatened by something; this is a time when our resolve to serve God and have confidence in Him is greatly tried.
 - Gideon and his valiant 300 were faced with the thousands in the Midianite army (Judges 7). This was a time of great threat for them. The Lord brought them to this place with only 300 warriors.
 - If there was ever a time when the temptation to abandon confidence in God was present, it must have been here. But God sent Gideon down to the Midianite camp to hear a message that was to give him rock-hard resolve to go on with confidence in the Lord.

- Concerning duress, life threatening circumstances are times of special challenge to our confidence that good things are going to happen
 - > It appears that duress coming by way of a message from Jezebel (1 Kings 19) is the very thing that sent the warrior / prophet Elijah fleeing into the desert. So, constraint resulting from threat, especially life-threatening circumstances, can certainly weaken our resolve to have confidence in God.

- Manmade laws that are against the very foundation of God are terrible things to endure, and can be powerful forces to erode our confidence in the idea that the Lord is going to give us a good outcome (Nebudchadnezzar had passed a law that everybody had to worship that idol)

II. Faith and Confidence Declares Itself - v. 17

- God Can
 - > "God can" defines our confidence in the total capability of God
 - > "God can" defines our belief in His omnipotence

- God Will
 - > “God will” defines our certainty concerning His intent
- Being able to distinguish between “God can” and “God will” helps us avoid disappointment.
 - > Pessimism is born of not having a solid understanding of what God will do.

III. The Alternative Outcome Is Contemplated and Accepted - v. 18

- “But if not...”
 - > These three believers knew that God would deliver them from this wicked king, but they had no guarantee that he would deliver them from the trial in the furnace (review their testimony in v. 17 again: “**is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace**, and he **will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.**”
- We will not bend
 - > Confidence in God does not rest in the certainty of comfortable outcomes,
 - > Confidence in God does not rest in realizing outcomes which preserve our mortal lives
 - > Confidence in God does not rest in any certainty that God will preserve our safety on earth
 - > Confidence in God rests in knowing FOR A CERTAINTY that God will do the very best for us (this is the unwritten testimony of these 3 men...the only thing that could have sustained them and made them certain that they were not going to bow to this idol nor this king)
 - This kind of confidence empowers us to say, “We know what God CAN do, we think we know what God WILL do, and we are fixed on what we will do and not do based on our confidence in God’s faithfulness.
 - Heb 13:6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
 - Rom 8:38-39 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But If Not

I stepped out on the plain of life and death that day,
As that great champion of defeat gave forth his mighty shout,
“I’ll have your bones for breakfast,” I heard him say,
“And with one blow, I’ll take you out!”

Here stood this giant called Compromise,
In all his threatening pall,
With weapons made from hardened lies,
Dead set on watching victims fall.

With airy promises of direst fate,
He thought to force my full surrender,
And brandishing both fear and hate,
Thought in my soul, despair he would engender.

“Give up this path you walk each day,”
He said with threatening face,
“You cannot walk this narrow way,
Else I will wreck you in this place.”

But in resolve that’s born of God,
I challenged this great lie,
And answered him with knowing nod,
I said, “You’ll try...I know you’ll try.

But there is one who guards my soul,
And guides my steps for sure,
And he will stop the worst that you control,
Then mitigate those things I must endure.

But, if I go through trial or pain in this life’s path that I have trod,
I’ll not abandon it nor bow to you,
Nor cease to leave outcomes to God,
Whose ways are right and true.”

Robert P. Myers, 2009