

**Introduction:**

Heavenly Father, to you we commend our lives and our spirits, you have saved us, you faithful God. Amen. (*A variation of Luther's deathbed prayer.*)

Fellow Christians who stand facing the flames. In Psalm 26 King David writes, *"Vindicate me, Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered. Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind."* Why did David say this? Is he being stuck up and self-righteous? No, the Bible says that David was a man after the Lord's own heart. He knew that faith is like gold, it gets refined in the hottest of fires. Trials make you lean even more on God. David is praying for trials so that his faith and trust in God might be stronger, more steadfast, or refined! What a bold and almost reckless prayer.

I think this type of thing might be totally lost on us in the culture that we live in. We always want to take the path of least resistance. Just the thought of discomfort or shame to the ever important "I" is enough to make us cringe and hope that those unpleasant things might not happen to us. When you stand up for Jesus at school or work, when you have the inevitable discussion about religion with a close friend the mood can get pretty heated. You have to decide if you are going to stay and feel the burn.

I think it's pretty obvious that if left to our own attitudes and devices we would turn tail and run from the first smell of smoke. But we are not alone; we are not left to our own powers. We see this morning from the account in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Daniel, three men who faced their fire with confidence. It was God who gave them the courage in their confession and it was God who saved them. God tells us the same thing in his word today **Face your fire with confidence! 1. God will give you courage 2. God will save you**

**Part I**

*Context/Exposition*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego really had everything to lose here. They were feeling the heat in more than one way! They were in powerful positions. The King liked them. They were wealthy and intelligent. Do you remember the story from your Sunday School day? These guys weren't no bodies! By the hand of God they were raised up to prominent positions in the Babylonian government. These men were chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to act as ambassadors to captive Israel. He hoped that there would be a monkey see, monkey do thing going on.

So if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego bowed down to this golden image of the King who would care! Really, by bowing down they secure their position with the King, and would the people know better? Convert today repent tomorrow! But these three men knew that their God was not made from gold and poured out of a smelter. They had come to know the powerful reality of their God. They would have remembered the miraculous story of how the LORD delivered his people from the false gods of the Egyptians. They would have known about how he showed his power over the elements by parting the Red sea, sending manna, quail and water from rocks. Yes, they knew their loving and powerful God who is and was always with his people. They were steadfast and determined to remain loyal to the God who had the power to rescue them, one way or the other.

What gave them the courage to confess? It was their loving God's power displayed in their lives and in the lives of the other Israelites. And it was this God given faith that led them to say, ***"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 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. 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."*** They would not be swayed by a powerful king, the peer pressure of seeing even some of their countrymen bow down or the threat of a fiery death.

## *Application*

So when is the last time someone told you to bow down and worship? Maybe there wasn't a huge golden statue. I think that there are a good number of things in our society that have achieved "god-like" status. I think we all know the obvious ones, love of money or possessions. But what about those that are a bit more subtle.

There is a prevailing attitude these days that God is dead or never existed in the first place. Scientists or scholars with a lot of letters after their name will flat out call you stupid because you believe in Jesus. These men are followed by thousands of people, many of whom are our friends, family or co-workers. Their message sounds attractive, logical and reasonable. "What does this guy who died 2000 years ago have anything to do with you or me?" They will get pretty fired up if you start talking to them about your faith. They will say what Nebuchadnezzar said, "Come on, you're being ridiculous! What we have to say makes so much more sense!" Do you stand and take the heat? Or are you wont to flee.

The question is where do you place your trust? Is it in your own wit or intelligence fueled by the safety of a group of friends who talk, act or even think like you? We shelter ourselves with these things. These things will fail. One day (or maybe this has already happened to you) you will be called to account for your faith. What then?

In the Gospel for today we heard Jesus say, ***"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."*** Now instead of taking comfort from this, some might say, that this sounds foolish! Let me tell you a story about a fool.

There was a young man canvassing a neighborhood for church. He came to a lady's house, knocked on the door, and totally dropped the ball. "Hi, uh I'm from the church uh, over there and it's nice, we have cool stuff for people etc. Thanks have a nice day!" He left and started up the street. He didn't get a block away when he thought how foolish that was, he got a little nervous, felt a little heat and booked it. He turned around and went back. When he saw her again he said, "I didn't feel right about what I said last time and I'm sorry to bother you again but I want to tell you what I believe..."

He would never see that lady again, but he wanted to see her in heaven. He showed her what conviction looked like. This was gospel motivation, love that Jesus had shown him gave him a genuine concern for a soul, and a desire to boldly proclaim the love that God has for us in Christ Jesus.

On this Reformation day, consider another fool. Against the power of the Emperor and all the princes of the church, against the power of the Pope stood one foolish monk. Why would he face death and imprisonment? The medieval church had taken the focus off of Christ! The Church of Luther's day had set up idols. The simple gospel message of sins forgiven by the blood of Jesus had been gotten lost in a wash of saint worship, relics and self-abasement. So when he was confronted at the Diet of Worms and told to recant or take back the things he had written concerning salvation by faith alone, grace alone and scripture alone, he calmly stated, "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me, Amen."

Confessions like Luther's and the other fellow I mentioned are contrary to human reason or understanding. They put us in harms/shames way. Our natural human instinct is to flee or conform. But our God is a miracle worker. It is a miracle that we believe; it is a miracle that we confess. It is the Blood of Christ shed for us, that gives us courage to confess in the heat of the moment. As it was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...

## ***Part II***

### *Exposition*

***"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."*** This furnace was the very thing that created

the golden statue. It was probably a technological marvel of the time. It was to be the instrument of death. Which is really unusual since incineration was not a normal means of execution in the ancient world. It was rather expensive and rarely was there a smelter or furnace big enough to fit 3 grown men inside.

You have to think about what the King is saying by doing this. It's sending both a political and religious message. "Look at this thing I have made, I have made a god. And now you will die in this thing that can make golden gods." They were to die quickly, there was no trial no chance for rebuttal, nothing. With their clothes still on, they are bound hand and foot and tossed down into this furnace. It was so hot, the air around it scorched the lungs of the executioners and they died almost instantly!

And probably while the guards were falling to the ground clutching their throats in death, the King leaps to his feet. There was another person standing in the midst of the flames. In the words of the king he looked like, "A son of the gods." Squinting their eyes to see through the heat waves emanating from the furnace, the king and his advisors saw the three Judeans, unbound, unharmed. And they see the angel! It's fitting really, a messenger from heaven sent to aid the human messengers on Earth.

This sign was not just given to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It was done for all the assembly of people to see. The account does not end here, obviously. They come out, unharmed, unsinged, unburned! But what if that was not the case? The three Judeans mention that possibility in their confession. They said, "**but if he does not...**"

They were prepared for it. Their God was worth dying for. While this golden statue may have been poured from a furnace smelter, their God had proven his power in the past. They knew that one way or the other, their God would deliver them. If that meant dying to glorify God for a reason that they did not fully understand, then they were at peace with that. They knew that their God would save them either physically, or Save them by taking them to heaven.

### *Application*

What's your furnace? I think we are all aware that there are some brothers and sisters in Jesus around the world dying right now, for the same reason that the three Judeans faced their execution. But in America we aren't confronted with death, yet. But should it come to that, and when you feel the flames from the unbelieving world around you, remember what your God has done for you!

When you get burned by family or friends, it's easy to get down, it's easy to doubt your faith. The desire rises up in us to forget our God, because it's easier, it's the path of least resistance. And let's be honest, Satan knows how to make a road. His roads are wide with nice things to look at, great distractions and a nice gradual downward slope. And while it might be nice to walk on now, it leads to a furnace that you can't escape.

We are really no different than Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. What they remembered was that their God has the power to save. Isn't this true of our lives as well? We have been taught and we have learned that we have a faithful God. He doesn't lead us into traps. He calls us his own children! In times of testing or doubt, or when you near the end of your race and your arms and legs are on fire, and you're so tired; remember, God says to you, "I saved you! I took the torture of hell on the cross in your place and the doors of heaven are open for you!"

The apostle Peter wrote, "***In all this [Trials] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.***"

Luther commented on these verses saying, we need these trials, because of our old sinful selves. Because when faith is tested all that is dross and false must pass away and drop off. Then is our reward in Christ Jesus revealed. Does that remind you of something, maybe David's psalm 26? "Test me Lord!" Strengthen my Faith!

### *Conclusion*

At the end of his life, at the end of his trials and all the heat he took from those who sought to put rules or things in the place of Christ; Luther indeed saw his faith refined. On his death bed surrounded by friends, Luther awoke in pain, one of his friends noticed that the end was near so he asked, "Do you wish to die in the faith that you have confessed, that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?" And with a simple, "Ja!" He died.

Brothers and Sisters, The same confidence that fired the confession of the three Judean men thousands of years ago, is our same confidence. Through the ages our God is the same. He gives courage to face the fires of this life and he has saved us from the fires of Hell. We can face any fire with confidence because of Christ. Amen.