

FACING THE FURNACE

DANIEL 3:1-30

Earlier this year United States Army reservists in Pennsylvania were shown a slide presentation. It identified groups considered “[Religious Extremists.](#)”

The list contained the usual suspects... *Al Qaeda, Hamas, even the KKK...* But the people group on top of the list might surprise you... “[Evangelical Christians.](#)”

After the slideshow made national news, leadership at the Pentagon tried to distance themselves from the presentation. They released a statement saying no one in the chain of command had reviewed the material.

Yet surely, in the production of the publication the list had to have been seen by numerous Army staffers.

How in the world did no one notice? How did a man holding such views get assigned to training recruits?

At the very least, the incident is one more piece of evidence of a changing perspective in America. *Bible-loving and living Christians* are becoming a minority.

Fox News columnist, Todd Starnes, writes “[It’s now something of a sport to attack Christians in this nation.](#)”

From Tebow to the Tea Party, Christians who dare to go on the record with biblical conviction get ridiculed.

Realize, historically speaking, whenever a group gets targeted for persecution, it first has to be demonized in the minds of the public... Hitler and the Nazis did this

with the Jews. Every negative happening in pre-war Germany was blamed on its Jewish citizens.

This is why the media bashing of Bible-believing Christians is so disconcerting. *We wonder what's next.*

Recently, I heard a pastor make the prediction, “I plan on dying in bed. But I expect my successor to die in prison. And I expect his successor to hang from the gallows.” *Is a wave of persecution coming to America?*

I hope not! I'm praying for a spiritual awakening to sweep over our land and turn us back to God. It's happened before, and it can again!... And I don't want to be *unnecessarily alarmist*. I'm not hoping for a crack-down on Christians, but the crackling of revival.

I just know that evangelical Christianity is no longer the majority persuasion. Christians no longer have the winds of culture at our back. We're now leaning into the wind. We need the resolve and backbone to stand.

Peter Sprigg is a spokesperson for the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian lobby.

When Sprigg speaks out publicly about the Bible's opposition to homosexuality, he says a strange thing happens. In the midst of his speeches people raise their hand to challenge his interpretation of the Bible's teaching, but no one steps up to lend him their support.

Yet after the speech, Christians will approach Sprigg, and whisper in his ear, “I agree with everything you said.” *Yet they were afraid of going on the record!*

I realize no one wants to lose their job...

No one wants to be labeled that awful term, “bigot.”

And no one wants to be marginalized by their belief on a single issue. But here’s the problem... **when did the foot-soldier get to pick his battles?** At times the fight comes to us. We should be strong enough to stand!

Amy Carmichael once put it, **“The reason there is so much shallow living - much talk but little obedience - is that so few are prepared to be, like the pine on the hilltop, alone in the wind for God.”** If one day you find yourself alone in the wind - *will you be able to stand?*

Here’s where we’re going this AM... Three brave, Hebrew exiles were thrown into a blazing furnace, because they refused to compromise their faith.

They believed in the one, true God.

In Jerusalem these men were part of the majority. Their faith was considered noble. It was supported by the culture. It was advantageous to remain faithful.

But now they’re in a *pagan land* - surrounded by *pagan influences* - serving under *pagan authorities*.

And though these men have excelled because of their conviction - their faith in their God hasn’t always been recognized as the reason for their success.

They know that ultimately their faith could become a liability. In the minority, you realize that at any time your faith could come in conflict with the pagans in power.

Even before the showdown we’ll read about today - *before these Hebrews felt the heat* - they had to take a stand. They had to buck up - have some backbone.

From the moment they arrived in Babylon, they were **facing the furnace**. And this is true of every person of faith who lives in a society dominated by secularism.

The furnace may be *a loss of friends, or cut in pay, or a failed class, or a demotion, or a job termination*.

One day it may actually be a flaming furnace... but potentially we're all subject to the fires of opposition.

One columnist writes, "It's time to stop focusing on the theoretical question of whether or not America should be called a Christian nation. It's time to face up to the fact that it is most obviously not one right now."

A Christian in today's America occupies minority status, and that means you're facing the furnace whether you realize it or not. You may never feel its heat - *I hope you don't* - but the furnace is in your face, not at your back. It's always a threat. It's a possibility.

How does a person live facing the furnace?

We find out in Daniel 3... Verse 1, "**Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.**" I'm sure you noticed we skipped chapter 2. We'll tackle it next week.

But in the previous chapter Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He sees the image of a man. It's head is gold. It's shoulders and chest are silver. It's midsection is bronze. It's belly is iron. And it's feet are iron and clay.

When Daniel interprets the dream he equates Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to the head of gold - and all that's below him - the inferior medals - are the kingdoms that will follow the rule of Babylon.

Eventually a rock strikes the image. It crumbles and turns into a great mountain - or the Kingdom of God.

I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar blamed the crumbling, on the kingdoms that followed him. And His ego had an answer. If he ruled forever, the kingdom wouldn't end.

That seems to be his thinking in chapter 3. He builds an image as in his dream - except, this statue isn't a mixture of medals, it's Babylonian gold - head to toe.

It's a 90 foot tall tribute to Emperor Nebuchadnezzar.

Hey, the trip to the plains of Dura was *an ego trip!*

The scene of what happens occurred 6 miles south of ancient Babylon in a wide-open plain. In 1854 an archeologist named Julius Oppert found a pedestal 45' square and 20' high. It supported a colossal statue.

He believed it was the foundation for this gold image.

We're told Nebuchadnezzar's statue was 60 cubits tall. Using the Babylonian cubit, or 21", that means the statue was 105' tall - by 6 cubits or 10.5' wide.

The average human has a height to weight ratio of 5 to 1. The king's image was 10 to 1 - which made it very, very skinny. Nebuchadnezzar envisioned himself as tall, gold, and *slender - another tribute to his vanity.*

The statue was probably overlaid with gold - *polished gold* - which caused it to glisten in the bright sunshine.

It made for an impressive sight! Standing over the level landscape, the statue could be seen for miles. It's possible 300,000 people turned out for Dedication Day.

Verse 2, "And King Nebuchadnezzar sent *word* to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." All the dignitaries were present - *everybody who was somebody!* "They stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up."

"Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, *that* at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Simply put, **bow or burn**. Worship, or you'll be the Colonel's extra crispy.

Notice the herald's announcement, "*when you hear the music...*" They probably had the latest American *Idol* winner take the stage... The newest *red hot* act...

Realize, this was a test of allegiance, *spiritually and politically*. Babylon's population consisted of conquered foes from around the world. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to unify his kingdom, and he used religion to do so.

Trust me, he isn't the first, nor the last politician to use religion to accomplish his political purposes.

Yet regardless of his motivation, the response would be the same for the faithful Hebrews. Despite the reason - they bowed to no one other than their God.

Verse 7, “So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

Here’s a photo of the Pope’s recent visit to Rio de Janeiro. Three million people stretched across a 2.5 mile stretch of beach. This is how I imagine the crowd of Babylonians shoulder to shoulder across the plain.

Then on cue, this mass of humanity bows their faces into the desert sands... except... *three lone individuals*.

Talk about sticking out in a crowd!

And we need to realize this scene gets repeated every day... In *your office, at school, at the block party, on the tennis team, in the gym* - 99% of the people bow to the god of conformity, or convenience, or comfort.

They bow to *the god of “cool” or “hip” or “why make waves.”* Very few people dare to *stand up* for God!

Let me ask you, are you willing to *stick up* for the Lord, even if it means you’ll *stick out* in the crowd?

When the world looks on, do you *stand up* or *roll over*? These three wouldn’t *bow*, nor would they *bend!*

Verse 8, “Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews.” The word translated “accused” means “tear and eat the pieces.” These accusers were savage. They were out for blood.

In Chapter 2 Daniel interpreted the king’s dream when all the other wise men failed. This won for Daniel the favor of the king... *and the jealousy of his peers.*

And the first move Daniel made after his promotion was to elevate *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.*

This made the other magi *hotter than a fiery furnace.*

So when the music played, and they saw Daniel’s favorites still on their feet, they ran to Nebuchadnezzar.

They snitch in verse 12, “There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.” Apparently, not everyone noticed the civil disobedience. Nebuchadnezzar would’ve never known had these jealous magi not ratted them out!

Which means Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego didn’t feel the need to *make a scene - or log a protest - or start a demonstration - or even preach a sermon...*

The three faithful Hebrews hadn’t signed up to be martyrs or suicide bombers. They were no masochists.

They weren’t relishing the publicity. If they could’ve floated under the radar they would’ve... But these men knew ***what they wouldn’t do*** - they could never bow to anyone or anything other than the one, true God.

Realize, the Babylonians beef with the Hebrews wasn't that they worshipped their God. It was their refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's gold image.

Sometimes faith is measured by what we're against.

This was why Christians were persecuted in ancient Rome. *Not a single Christian died for loving Jesus.* The Romans didn't care if you loved and worshipped Jesus, just as long as you pledged allegiance to the Caesar.

All you had to do was take a pinch of incense, toss it on the fire, and confess three-words, "[Caesar is Lord.](#)"

But as simple as that was, the Christians wouldn't do it - they refused. There was only one Lord, and His name was King Jesus! And they wouldn't betray Him.

And this remains the issue today!

Nobody cares if *you* love Jesus. In fact, most people **say** they love Jesus - then they leave the room and do as they please. *But do you love Jesus enough to take a stand, and refuse to bow down to what He forbids?*

Real Christianity refuses to yield to the status quo, and to the gods of this age. It marches to a heavenly drumbeat! It lives to please God - not appease evil.

This is the courageous stand these men made...

Verse 13, "Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?*"

The king knew these men. He trusted them. He never expect them to betray his orders.

That's why Nebuchadnezzar doesn't take someone else's word for it, he asks them personally, *"Is it true?"*

In fact, Nebuchadnezzar is willing to pick up his flag, and replay the down. He'll give them another chance...

"Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." And this was no idle threat.

History records that he had done it before. Once, he roasted his officers on a spit when they disobeyed him.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had refused to **bow**, but now the temptation gets ratcheted up... will they **bend** a little? *Will they rationalize a compromise?*

They're no longer just faces in a vast crowd, now they're before the king. *Can they be intimidated? Will they squirm? Will they justify an excuse or a loophole?*

I could think of few... What about their fellow Jews?

These three men were in position to help God's people. Yet what can they do for their brothers if they're dead? *Bow just once, and look at the good you can do!*

If it were me in their sandals, and the king offered me a do-over, I might've thought, *"It's a sign from God! He's showing me mercy. I should take advantage."*

But not one of these excuses crosses either of their three minds. Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego knew their Bible, and Nebuchadnezzar was asking them to violate the first two of God's Ten Commandments.

There's no way that could be the will of God.

I like what the king says in verse 15, *"If you are ready..."* He's thinking ready to bow. *They were ready, but not to bow.* They were ready to take a stand.

There's a mission agency in South Asia called ["Asian Access."](#) In one of the Hindu countries where they serve, the pastors have a list of seven questions they'll ask a new believer before he or she is baptized. The questions test the convert's readiness to follow Jesus...

Let's pretend I'm asking you these questions...

First, are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father? (throw away an inheritance.)

Second, are you willing to lose your job?

Third, are you willing to go to the village, and to those who persecute you, forgive them, and share the love of Christ with them?

Fourth, are you willing to give an offering?

Fifth, are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?

Sixth, are you willing to go to prison?

Seventh, are you willing to die for Jesus?

If the new believer answers **"yes"** to all seven of the questions the pastors invites them to sign their name.

There're signifying that they have voluntarily decided to follow Jesus... *But here's the big risk:* if the convert signs the paper, and then gets caught by the police, he or she can end up spending three years in prison.

And the pastor who baptized them will get six years.

Now let me ask us, [are we ready to follow Jesus?](#)

Hopefully, the new believers saved and baptized through the ministry of Asian Access won't suffer this way at all. But if they do, *they'll be ready.* [Being in the minority they were "born again" facing the furnace.](#)

I'm not sure that was the direction any of us were facing when we gave our life to Jesus - but it's the direction we're facing now. And **we** need to get ready!

1 Peter 4:12 tells us, ["Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you..."](#) In other words, every Christian should live in expectation of a furnace.

It's not unusual for Christians to feel the heat.

For 250 years Christians in America have enjoyed a majority status, at times a favored status - but that's an anomaly - *it's an exception rather than the rule...*

Today, missionaries in Mexico live under constant threat from drug cartels, Christian churches in Egypt are burned by the Muslim Brotherhood, Indian Christians are attacked by radical Hindus, and Christians pastors are tortured in Iranian prisons...

Three weeks ago, on August 5, the assistant pastor at the CC Bistrita, Romania, and his son, were kidnapped and murdered. Police are still investigating.

Adi Blaga was martyred for his faith in Jesus.

Adi's pastor called his friend and co-laborer, "One of the most godly men I've ever had the honor to serve with." This week CCSM sent his widow a love offering.

This is the kind of persecution Christians have experienced since Jesus founded our faith. That we in America haven't been subjected is a blessing we've probably taken for granted - *but it's not a guarantee.*

If all you've suffered for the sake of Christ is *the loss of a friend, or a sale, or a promotion, or even a job...*

If your only scars are from being *laughed at, or mocked, or passed over...* be thankful for God's mercy!

I hope and pray that persecution in this country never rises to the level of a fiery furnace - *but it could.*

One thing is for sure, today we're living in an cultural climate **where the furnace is before us, not behind us.**

Verse 15 ends with the king boasts, "**And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?**" Remember the man is on an ego trip. Nebuchadnezzar believes he's greater than all the gods - even Israel's God.

At the moment he's the only god who can be seen. And Nebuchadnezzar mistakenly assumes that's the only God there is. He's about to find out otherwise.

Verse 16, "**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter."** In other words, **"we've already made up our minds!"**

Remember what was said of Daniel when he was asked to compromise his diet. In 1:8, “*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.*”

He “*purposed in his heart...*” More often than not, obedience, conviction, makes up its mind beforehand.

Wait to decide in the moment of temptation - in the midst of the crisis - and you’ve usually waited too late! Chances are you’ll buckle under to the pressure. Life makes up its mind in advance. You live a purposeful life when you “*purpose in your heart*” ahead of time.

It reminds me of the 1999 Columbine tragedy. In the High School library the two terrorists interrogated frightened students... “*Does anyone have a faith in Christ?*” Seventeen year-old, Cassie Bernall, stood up.

One of the killers asked, “*Do you believe in God?*”

Joshua Lapp, an eyewitness, hiding 25 feet from Cassie, said later, “*It was really cruel the way he said it. It was almost like Satan was trying to talk through him.*” Cassie answered, “*Yes, I believe in Jesus!*”

Lapp was reliving the moment, “*She was scared, but she sounded strong, like she knew what she was going to answer.*” Next, the killer stuck the nose of his gun against Cassie’s temple, and asked her, “*why?*”

Before she could answer, he squeezed the trigger.

But notice what the eyewitness said... “*She knew what she would answer...*” Her mind was made up ahead of time. When students go to school ready for a test, you don’t think of this kind of test, *but Cassie was ready* - as were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego...

The king threatens them with the furnace, and they reply, verse 17, “*If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*”

What confidence to have in a God they’d never seen!

Imagine, standing before the most powerful man on the planet. This is the general who conquered and killed their people back in Judah... The king who rules the world, and at that moment oversees thousands of bowing subjects... Before them is his throne and the trappings of his might... It’s all an intimidating sight...

Yet they trumpet their faith, “*He will deliver us...*” In fact, they make it personal, “*He will deliver us from your hand.*” I’m sure that further infuriate the Emperor.

Then they add, “*But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.*”

I love this answer, “*Our God will deliver us from your hand... but if not...*” And there’s no contradiction here.

God will deliver them *from Nebuchadnezzar - if not from the fire*. Even if they burn, they’ll be free from his tyranny. They’ll enter their heavenly reward, and be taken to a place where he can never touch them again.

God will deliver them from this tyrant one way or the other - **either from the fire or through the fire.**

And I love this balance. They had confidence in God’s ability, yet they didn’t overstep their bounds and assume they could determine His will and methods...

So often we make the mistake of trusting in a particular outcome - rather than trusting in God, and letting Him determine the outcome. Our faith is not really in God... It's in God working in the way I desire...

Real faith is a *"but if"* faith... I believe God can cure my cancer, *but if* He doesn't, I still will never deny Him.

I believe God will turn my child around... or save my marriage... or ease my financial woes... or stop the foreclosure... *but even if not, I'll never deny Him!*

That's true faith... It's furnace-facing faith!

Real faith is trusting God Himself - relying on Him in His wisdom to do as He sees fit! It's more concerned with *outlook* than *outcome*. Real faith understands its me that's being tested in the problem - not God. God will do what's best, not necessarily what pleases me.

Real faith is much more concerned with *maintaining my witness* than it is *saving my skin* - or *acknowledging God's sovereignty* than it is in *insisting on my will*.

Outcome-only faith is a subtle evil.

Studdard Kennedy was a combat chaplain in WW2. He ministered to soldiers on the front lines in France.

He often found himself in dangerous situations.

From the battlefield he wrote a letter to his 10 year-old son. "Son, the first prayer I want you to say for me is not, 'God, keep Daddy safe,' but, 'God make Daddy brave. And if he has hard things to do, make him strong to do them.' Son, life and death don't matter. But right and wrong do. Daddy dead is Daddy still, but Daddy

dishonored before God is something too awful for words. I suppose you would like to put into your prayer a bit about safety, too, and Mother would like that, I'm sure. Well, put it in afterwards, for it really doesn't matter nearly as much as doing what is right."

This is real faith. I'm sure Shadrach, Meshech, and *Abed-Nego* would've also gladly signed such a letter!

Verse 19, "Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego." It got red. Ole Nebuchadnezzar popped a blood vessel in his neck.

Dictatorial tyrants aren't used to opposition.

"He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated."

The attendants stoked the flames even hotter.

"And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *and* cast *them* into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." In essence, they're dressed in flammables.

A NASCAR driver wears a fire-proof suit when he gets inside his car. These guys suit up in kindling.

"Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abed-Nego.” The fire was so intense the jailers who tossed in the victims were scorched.

Verse 23, “**And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace... Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished... (And it’s interesting to me, that the king was the first to see the miracle...)**

And he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

I asked earlier, “**would you be willing to stand alone against the wind, or the fire?**” But the truth is that when you stand for Jesus you never stand alone! When the king gazed into the inferno there was a fourth person...

One “**like the Son of God**” - *who could that be but Jesus?* He’ll be with you when you step into the fire!

Yet, here’s a question - the king saw a fourth person, *but did the three Hebrews?* Most of the artists who paint the scene depict the four men in the fire as if they’re posing for a photo, *but our text doesn’t tell us whether the three men were aware of the fourth man...*

When we go through the fire Jesus is always with us!

Sometimes we sense His presence, but sometimes we don’t. On occasion we feel the tight squeeze of His hand - on other occasions we hold on to raw faith.

But even in the dark moments people around us can see Him. They're able to admire His strength in us.

In the Septuagint, or Greek version of the OT, there is a section here that doesn't appear in the Hebrew Bible. It gives us a vantage point from inside the fire.

The passage says the Angel of the Lord "smote the flame of the fire out of the oven, and made the midst of the furnace as though a wind of dew had gone hissing through it." The Son of God hollowed out from the surrounding flames a cool spot in the middle of the fire.

On the surface the furnace was hot enough to consume the guards who tossed in the Hebrews, but at the core, where you'd expect it to burn hottest, the three Hebrews enjoyed a peaceful, refreshing breeze.

If we trust that excerpt, it's likely that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were very conscious of their companion. It's ironic, but sometimes *the sweetest fellowship - deepest communion - highest praise - most exhilarating joy...* is felt in the flames of persecution.

I've never run a marathon, but I know it requires intense training. Yet there's a part of the race for which you can't prepare. A marathon is just over 26 miles, and the experts tell you to never run over 20 miles in your training. The last six miles are a "no man's land."

There's no preparation for those final six miles. You don't know what'll happen until you get there. You may hit a wall or pull up with cramps. All you know is if you train right *you'll find what you need when it's needed.*

And this is the faith that's required in a time of testing. It's impossible to know what

the fire is like until you're in it. But we can be sure that Jesus will be there with us, *for the last lap*, to supply exactly what we lack.

We're told in Hebrews 4:16 *Jesus intercedes with God, to provide for us*, "grace to help in time of need."

Verse 26, "Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here."*

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them." The Hebrews didn't **bow** - didn't **bend** - and in the end, they didn't **burn**.

Not a single hair, or thread was singed. You couldn't even pick up the smell of smoke from their clothes.

If you've ever had a house fire you know the odor.

Afterwards, it's extremely difficult to get rid of the sulphur fumes. They get into the curtains and carpets. The fabrics absorb the noxious toxins. Yet not even the slightest scent of the fire was detectable on these men.

God not only delivered them from the fire, but from its after-effect. There were no lingering consequences.

The only thing that burned on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were the ropes that had bound them.

Their faith and God's deliverance freed them from their fears... Courageous faith will do the same for you!

The fiery trials we're called to endure only serve to purify us, and burn off the impediments to our growth and witness. God *burns away* what *holds us back*.

Only what binds is allowed to burn.

Realize, God may not always deliver you **from the fire**, but He will always be with you **through the fire**.

I love Isaiah 43, "Thus says the LORD, who created you... Fear not, for I have redeemed you... you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the holy One of Israel, Your Savior."

I love how it all ends! Verse 28, "Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!" He acknowledges their faith.

And more importantly, he acknowledges their God...

"Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap..." King Nebuchadnezzar must've been a bit of a pyromaniac, since he still can't get setting fires out of his system... At least now, he has good intentions...

And notice his change of heart... “because there is no other God who can deliver like this.” This pagan king is learning... Earlier he boasted that no god could deliver them out of his hand - *now He’s found One!*

People feel a safety and power when they’re in the majority, **but a minority plus God trumps the majority.**

Even though we face the furnace, *let’s not be afraid!*