

The Fourth Man

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the unwavering faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the face of persecution and God's miraculous presence during their trial in the fiery furnace.

Duration: 33:18

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 43:2, Matthew 28:20, Romans 8:31, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 13:5, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13

Topics: "Faith And Trials", "Gods Deliverance"

Description

This sermon is based on the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Daniel chapter 3, highlighting their unwavering faith in God despite facing the fiery furnace. It emphasizes the presence of God in the midst of trials, the importance of trusting in God's deliverance, and the assurance that God will see us through even the darkest times. The sermon encourages listeners to have resolve and convictions in their faith, not compromising with the demands of the world, but standing firm in their trust in God.

Transcript

We're going to change the scripture reading from that which is in the bulletin, and we're going to read this morning Daniel chapter 3. It's a rather long reading, but a great story. So Daniel chapter 3, I'll read the first, the odd-numbered verses. We ask you to join together in the reading of the even-numbered verses, and shall we stand as we read the word of God.

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold whose height was three-score cubits, and the breadth thereof was six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

And then the princes and the governors and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all of the rulers of the provinces were gathered together under the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. And they stood, my fault, before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, the flute, the harp, the sacred, the psaltery, the dulcimer, and all of the kinds of music, that you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

And whoso falleth not down and worship it shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, the flute, harp, sacred, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all of the people and the nations and the languages fell down and they worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near and accused the Jews.

They speak and said unto the king, Nebuchadnezzar, they spoke, And, O king, live forever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sacred, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoso falleth not down and worshipeth that he shall be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace.

There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, have not regarded thee, they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. And then Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage and fury, commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, the flute, the harp, the sacred, the psaltery, and the dulcimer, and all kinds of music, that 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 the burning fiery furnace, and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

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 thy hand, O king. 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. And then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And therefore he spake, and he commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. And then these men were bound in their coats with their hats and with their other garments, and they were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And then these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth of the midst of the fire.

And the princes, the governors, and the captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was there a hair of their head singed, and neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire passed upon them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and hath changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own god. Therefore I make a decree that every people, nation, and language which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, their shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other god that can deliver after this sword.

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this exciting story that shows the power that is available to those will put their trust and confidence totally in you, who will not make a compromise with the demands of the world, but will stand fast in their convictions.

Lord, we pray that you'll help us to be that kind of person, that we will have resolves and convictions, Lord, that we will not compromise with that which we know to be true. So Lord, bless, we pray, as we study now this exciting story, and help us, Lord, to draw from it the lessons that you would have us to learn, that we might, Lord, become servants of the Most High God, serving you, Lord, in truth. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. You may be seated. The exciting story of three men who refused to follow the edict of the king, because it violated their conscience before God.

The golden image, it was really an image that was built in, sort of, defiance of God. Nebuchadnezzar had had a troubling dream, a dream of a great image that had a head of gold, but it had a chest of silver, it had a stomach of brass, it had legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. And he watched this great image until there came a rock out of the mountain, not cut with hands, smote the great image in its feet, the whole image crumbled, dissolved, and that rock grew into a mountain that covered the earth.

And the Lord spoke through Daniel to the king and said, Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold. God has shown to you the kingdoms that will rule over the world in the future, but your kingdom is to be replaced by the Medo-Persian Empire. That will be replaced by the Grecian Empire, which, of course, will be conquered by the Roman Empire.

And the final empire will be made up of European nations that were related to the Roman Empire, but not as strong. And it is during the time of these ten kings that the Lord of heaven will set up his kingdom that shall never end. And so he was really defying the interpretation of the dream that he had of this image, because he made his image all of gold, which meant that he was just declaring Babylon will not fall, Babylon will stand forever.

But he was wrong. Babylon did fall to the Medo-Persian Empire just shortly after his death. And so this image that he was demanding that they all bow down and worship was a defiance against the word of God.

When the music sounded, these three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refused to bow before this idol. And it was reported to Nebuchadnezzar, who in turn called them in and said, you know, I heard that you didn't bow when I sounded the music. I'm going to sound it again.

And if you bow, OK, you've made it. But if you don't, then you'll be cast into the burning fiery furnace. And so he was giving them sort of a last chance, a last opportunity.

He said to them, who is the God that can deliver you out of my hands? A question. They answered, the God that we serve. He is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King.

And if he doesn't, we still won't serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. So there are like men like Nebuchadnezzar who you learn not to cross their wishes. They go into uncontrolled rages.

We read of the rage and the fury on hearing their refusal to obey his command. Verse 19 tells us he was so full of fury, he ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual and that the strongest men in the kingdom to bind these three Hebrew boys and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace fully clothed. God did not deliver them from, but he delivered them in.

He could deliver from their trials. He could deliver us from our trials, but he doesn't always do so. But we can be sure that he will deliver us in our trials.

Whatever you may go through, the Lord will be with you, and he can see you through the darkest hours, the deepest valleys, the most difficult situations that we might be forced to face. If you find yourself in the midst of the fiery trial, it doesn't mean that God has forsaken you. You, it means that he's just chosen another way to accomplish his purposes in and through your life.

Whenever I'm facing a difficult problem, I have a tendency to try in my mind to solve that problem. How could I resolve this issue? How can I get out of this mess that I am in? And I usually in my mind work out, well, if this would happen like this, then that could happen like that. And, you know, then this would then, and, you know, I had this complicated thing all worked out in my mind, how I can escape the problem that I'm facing.

And it's interesting, though I have this complicated thing all worked out in my mind, God doesn't always follow my plan. And whenever he doesn't follow my plan, I get upset because I figured, you know, I've got the perfect thing all worked out and yes, complicated, but he can do it. And yet he's not following what I wanted him to do.

And, you know, you begin to accuse God of not loving you and not really interested in your problems or wanting to help you. And, you know, it's interesting how that when we work out our problem in our minds, rather than direct prayers, Oh, Lord, get me out of this mess. It's Lord, here's what you need to do now, you know, work in their hearts and cause them to make this decision.

It used to be in the years that we were going through some financial hardships with the drawing family that I would think, you know, if I would just win the Reader's Digest sweepstakes, I'm going to be on easy street and everything will be okay. And so I would enter the contest. I would get these little memos from the Reader's Digest people saying, congratulations, you know, you're among the finalists and I'd get all excited and wait for that day when they were going to have the drawing.

And, you know, in fact, I wouldn't even go to work on that day. I would wait for the phone to ring and I'm sure that this is the way the Lord is going to solve my problem. I'm going to get this phone call and I'm going to discover that I won the sweepstakes and going to be happy days, you know, going to pay off the

bills.

I'm going to be debt free. Those calls never did come. I waited year after year.

They never did come. And, you know, you think, oh, Lord, you failed me again, you know, and you could have very easily, Lord, I mean, someone had to win and I could have been that winner and Lord, you didn't do it. Lord, you let me down.

You failed me. But it's interesting how that oftentimes, well, let me just say the Lord always saw that our bills were all paid. I never did have to go to debtor's prison.

I was able to always take care of the bills the Lord always provided, but not in the way that I expected him to or wanted him to. God doesn't always do things according to our expectations. He said his ways are not our ways.

His ways are beyond our finding out. So just because he isn't following your instructions, don't panic. He's got other ways of doing his work in our lives.

The King asked these three fellows, who is that God that can deliver you out of my hands? And they responded, the God that we serve is able to deliver us out of your hand, O King. He may and he may not, but that doesn't matter. We still are not going to bow down and worship your image.

The King Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than normal and that they be cast in to this burning, fiery furnace. Here's where you might say, well, Lord, you waited too long.

You had your chance to save them, but you missed it. Lord, you could have probably have delivered them from that burning, fiery furnace. You could have made it a way of escape, but Lord, you failed them.

And now they are cast into that burning, fiery furnace. Lord, you missed your opportunity to help them. I don't know how many times in my life the Lord has passed my deadlines.

I've set so many deadlines. Lord, you have until Friday, two o'clock in the afternoon to take care of this situation. And, you know, so you wait for Friday to come and it's three o'clock and you say, well, Lord, it's after two.

You missed it. You had your chance to do it. And now, Lord, I've got to face the problem.

But we think that, you know, the Lord has missed a deadline that we have set for him. Uh, but yet he does come through. Not as I had planned, not according to my schedule, but I've often found that he had a much better way and his timing was always perfect.

When he came through, it was not as I had planned, but a much better plan in which he gets greater glory for what he did. King Nebuchadnezzar, as he looks into the fire, he's astonished. He calls out, how many did we put in the fire? And they answered three.

And he said, how come I can see four walking around in the midst of the fire? And the fourth looks like the Son of God. Here's a comforting truth. If you find yourself in the fire, for his sake, he will be with you in the fire.

In Isaiah 43 too, the Lord said, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. And when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

And neither shall the flame be kindled upon you. I love it how the Lord says when you walk through the water or through the river or through the fire. You remember in Psalm 23, the psalmist said, yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me.

Notice he didn't say, yea, though I walk in the valley, but yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. When I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death, there can only be a shadow because there is a light on the other side. And I'm walking on into the light, the light of my father's house, as I have to pass through this valley with the shadow of death cast over the path.

But I'm not walking in the shadow of death, but through this valley of the shadow of death into the glorious light of my father's house on the other side. I'm so thankful that in every fiery trial that I might face, I can count on the fact that he will be with me to see me through. I will not stay in the valley, but I shall pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

When Stephen, the first martyr of the early church, was being stoned, as he was dying, he looked up and he declared, I see heaven open. And I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He was standing to take him by the hand and to welcome him home.

For these three Hebrew children, the only thing that they lost in the fire was the, were the ropes with which they were bound. They burned off, nothing else burned, not even their beards were singed by the fire. This, the clothes didn't even have the smell of smoke on them.

The only thing they lost were the ropes that were binding them. Many times the Lord allows us to go through the fires of affliction, never to destroy us, but to destroy those bonds that are destroying us, the bondages in our lives. And the purpose is to set you free.

Many people are bound by destructive addictions. God allows you to go through some fiery trial to destroy those bonds. He wants you to walk around free in the midst of the fire.

In fact, he will walk with you. Some feel that they are forsaken by God because of the fiery trial they're going through, but not so. He is there to see you, that you might make it through the valley.

God said in Isaiah 41 10, Fear not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will help thee.

I will uphold thee. Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. The reason why we are not to fear the fire or any other obstacle that we might face is that he might be with us.

Fear not, I am with you. And truly, that is what will dispel any fear or question or doubt that we might have in our mind. The awareness, the consciousness that the Lord is with me in the fire.

He will be there to be with me. I will not be consumed by the fire. The reason why we're not to fear the fire is that we always in those times become aware and conscious that the Lord is with us.

No matter how difficult our circumstances, he is there with us. He is the fourth man in the fire. He is there to make sure that we will make it safely through.

As we say, how firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent word. What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled. He said, fear not.

When you pass through the fire, I'll be with you. When you pass through the water, they'll not overflow you. And yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you are with me.

I don't believe that there's any time in our life where we are more conscious of the presence of the Lord with us than when we get to that valley of the shadow of death. And you know, it's a glorious thing to have that confidence that he's with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death. As you know, I've been tested recently, went through some chemotherapy and so forth for lung cancer, and I got the report this week after the treatments that I've gone through.

That it has not diminished to the extent that they can perform surgery. So they just are really going to look at other options now. But the glorious thing is I'm in a win-win situation.

You know, I don't have any worries. I don't have any fears. And I don't need to because he is with me.

And I know that come what may, he's not going to desert me now. But he's going to be with me. He's going to see me through.

And you know, the worst thing that happened, I'll be with him. So that's not bad. And so it's one of those kind of things that you're just trusting in the Lord and it's good to know.

You know, fear no evil because thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

But what when I get to the end of the days of my life? Well, then I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I mean, that's not bad. So, you know, it's a glorious thing to have that confidence in the Lord.

How long he's going to leave me around, I really don't know. And, you know, probably some of you are praying, well, Lord, take him home. But he will in his time.

And it'll be perfect timing when he does. Father, thank you for the confidence that we can have knowing, Lord, that our lives are in your hand and knowing, Lord, that if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we're going to come out on the other side into the glorious light of your heavenly kingdom. And so, Lord, we thank you for the confidence and for the hope that we have in and through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And Father, we just pray that you'll just guide and direct us each step of our life, that we might, Lord, become all that you would have us to be as we follow after you, Lord, and commit our ways unto you. Thank you, Jesus, for all of the things that you've done for us, all of the things that you've promised. And, Lord, we just look forward to that glorious day when we will be with you, present in your eternal kingdom, and, Lord, never to be separated again from your presence and from your love.

And so, Lord, guide us, bless us, use us as you see fit, Lord. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front. It may be that you're going through the fiery trial. Maybe you feel like you're in the fiery furnace and, you know, and or at least you're being the threat of being cast into that fiery furnace.

And it may be that there's a lot of fear that is gripping your heart today over the circumstances that you're facing. But know this, the only thing that the Lord is going to burn are the bonds that are necessary to be burned to set you entirely free. And so, you know, welcome the fire of God upon our lives because it's only a purifying fire.

It's getting rid of the dross, going to leave just that which is pure, and the pure gold, the pure silver, once the dross is removed. So the pastors are down here to pray for you today. And if you're going through a fiery trial, the Lord will be with you and his presence with you.

And they'll be glad to pray for you that God will just really minister to you and accomplish his purposes in and through the tough situation that you're facing now. That you'll see the hand of God in it and you'll come out rejoicing in what God has done, what God has wrought, and how he has worked in your life through these circumstances that you might be looking upon now as adverse and difficult and hard and all, but yet God has a purpose in it and he's going to bring you out on top. So God bless you, fill you with his spirit, encourage you to walk in full commitment to him and just experience his presence, his power, his love working in and through your life and touching others for his glory.

God bless you.

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