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LET YOUR FAITH DO THE TALKING!

Today's Text: Daniel Chap. 3

Extracts:

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king [who asked them], "Is it true ... that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? [He added] "If you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" [They] answered and said to the king, "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this manner. 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. But if not, let it be known to you ... that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*" [Dan. 3: 13-18]

In a company in Lagos (Nigeria) that I know so well, there was a young Christian woman who was married to a Moslem. Before their marriage, her husband had assured her that he would allow her unfettered freedom to practise her Christianity. Then, quite unexpectedly, he told her to choose between their marriage and her religion, that she had to renounce Christ and become a Moslem. She told her husband that she loved him and valued their marriage but affirmed, "nothing can separate me from the love of Christ." Infuriated, her husband threw her out into the cold rainy night and out of his life. All entreaties from friends and family fell on deaf ears. Today, some fifteen years later, her career has blossomed and she is now a senior professional officer in a United Nations agency. Her only daughter who grew up with a Moslem father is a fire-brand Christian! When asked why she did not take after her father's faith, she said, "Mummy's faith spoke more authoritatively to my heart than my Daddy's."

When the young wife faced a life-changing situation, her faith did the talking. She risked all for Christ. How about you? In your home, office or business, you face situations that may compel you to choose between your faith and the world, between good and evil. You may be in that part of the world where there is religious persecution, and you are asked to renounce Christ or die. Are you going to succumb to fear and give up all that you have professed all these years? Can you actually call yourself a person of faith when you have not had the opportunity to prove it? How much will you sacrifice for the love of Christ? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. The context: faith in a hostile territory

The Jewish exiles in Babylon came from Judah where the worship of the one true God was the norm and idolatry was an aberration. In Babylon, on the other hand, idol worship was the state religion. In the particular case of today's study, the king, Nebuchadnezzar, made an image of gold that was 60 cubits in height (i.e., 90 feet or about 28 metres) and 6 cubits in width and set it in a prominent place in the province of Babylon, the very territory administered by three young Jewish exiles, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. He set a date for the dedication ceremony and invited all his officials. His herald broadcast the accompanying decree that whoever heard the call (by music) had to fall down and worship the gold image, failing which they would "be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery fire" [Dan. 3: 1-6]. If you were in the place of those Jewish exiles, what would you do? Would you:

a) *Join them if you cannot beat them?*

It was not necessary to face the awful ordeal of fighting a losing battle with a strong king like Nebuchadnezzar. After all, the three Jewish exiles had just been promoted to high administrative positions in the province of Babylon [Dan. 2: 49]. Would it not be like biting the finger that fed them to refuse the king's order?

In similar circumstances, many of us would succumb to the lure of material gain or the need to reduce pain. Anything we value more than God is an image of gold. It could be money or titles or sexual perversion. Right now, Satan may be pushing some state authority where you live to erect an image of gold to set a trap for you. It could be recognition of same-sex marriage. It could be an unjustifiable war. It could even be a pregnancy outside of marriage and you are under pressure to abort it. The decision you take that goes against the law of the land or popular opinion could earn you public disgrace or loss of employment or popularity.

But to do what everybody else does may not be in your long-term interest. A good example was Job's wife. It is true that, having lost her seven sons and three daughters within a short space of time, she was in a delirium. Much worse, her husband who could have been her succour, had become riddled with boils all over his body. In spite of all, he was still preaching faith and fear of God to her. She became furious and told her husband, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" Her husband shot back, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we in deed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" [Job 2: 9-10]. What if her husband had succumbed to her pressure? Ultimately, on account of her husband's refusal to "join them," Job's wife bore seven sons and two daughters in place of those that she had lost [Job 42: 13].

This option could not be attractive to Shadrach and his companions for several reasons. Firstly, the king of Babylon is a figure of Lucifer [Is. 14: 4-15]. Therefore, coming so soon after Nebuchadnezzar had recognized Daniel's God as "the God of gods and the Lord of kings" [Dan. 2: 47], the image of gold was a symbol of the devil's rebellion against God. So, for them, to worship an image of gold was idolatry and rebellion against God. Secondly, the word of God says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small" [Prov. 24: 10]. Shadrach and his companions were hardly faint-hearted. Therefore, joining others to worship the image of gold would not be a good option for them.

b) *Separate church and state?*

Some of us may recommend the doctrine of separation of church and state to deal with the crisis. After all, did Jesus not say that we should render to Caesar what was Caesar's and to God what was God's? As senior state officials in charge of the province of Babylon where the image of gold had been erected, protocol demanded that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego should play leading roles in ensuring that that state policy was effectively implemented! Religion was a private thing and they were free to worship their God in private after official hours.

There are several reasons why people may not show their faith in public. It could be due to fear of persecution or death. For example, fear pushed Peter to deny Jesus thrice [Matt. 26: 69-75]. It could be due to fear of losing social or religious status. For example, Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus by night [Jn 3: 1]. For fear of being thrown out of the temple, the parents of the man born blind, were not bold enough to admit to the Pharisees that it was Jesus that had opened their son's eyes, "for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue [Jn 9: 19-23]. It could also be due to monetary gains. For example, the soldiers that guarded the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid knew that Jesus rose from the dead. However, to pervert that truth, the Jews asked them to tell the governor (Pilate) that the disciples of Jesus came to steal His body while they (the guards) were fast asleep! Should Pilate want to kill them for dereliction of duty, the Jews would appease him. To make sure that the soldiers did their bidding, the Jews bribed them and "they took the money and did as they were instructed" [Matt. 28: 11-15].

Another reason that we may choose to hide our faith is cowardice! For example, when some of us are in familiar settings, such as within the family or in their churches, they give you the impression that their faith can move mountains. However, the moment they have the opportunity to show it in public, they chicken out and give excuses! The father who may

spend several minutes to bless food at home before the family starts eating will hardly pray over the food that they are served at the restaurant. Wouldn't it be embarrassing to close your eyes or make the sign of the cross in the midst of non-believers? How about going to the scene of an accident to pray to raise some of the dead victims to life? That is not faith, they would say. It is presumptuous! But did Christ not say that believers will do greater works than He did?

Therefore, when you claim to be a firm believer but collude with others in public to go against the laws of God, you have buried your faith. You have denied Christ before men! You are serving God and mammon at the same time. Shadrach and his companions would hardly agree to offend God that way.

c) *Bite the bullet?*

Some people are of the position that the best response to evil is to resist it at any cost. To do otherwise is merely to postpone the evil day. Consequently, some of us are prepared to lose everything (power, position, wealth or even life) for their faith. The young woman in our opening story gave up her blissful marriage for her faith in Christ. There are stories of civil servants or business executives who have lost their plum jobs rather than compromise their Christian integrity. There are some others that God has called to give up their earthly jobs or professions and become ministers of His word. In each case, it is a clear choice between obedience (faith) and disobedience (fear of the unknown). The people who fear and trust their God will take the plunge. It is such people that are listed in the Scriptures' Hall of Fame, people [**Heb. 11: 33-37**]:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword... women [who] received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance... others had trials of mockings and scourging... of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, .. sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword...

Such are the believers who speak loudly to us and the world with their faith. Today's study is about such people.

2. **Three young Jews speak aloud with their faith!**

On Daniel's recommendation, King Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon [**Dan. 2: 49**]. Such a promotion brings its own challenges. You become a senior official of state and your pledge of allegiance is to the king. Nevertheless, when the day

came for the king's order to be implemented, everyone else fell down to worship the gold image except the Jews. The Chaldeans (presumably the king's security forces) informed the king that his decree had been disobeyed by "certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon... These men.. have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up: **[Dan. 3: 1-13]**.

. Let us follow the sequence of events:

a) *Danger loomed for them*

The king invited Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to defend the allegation against them or face instant death in a burning fiery fire. Of course, the king already had an idea of what the God of the Jews could do, following Daniel's revelation of his dream (Chapter 2). So, he upped the threat by telling the young Jews, "Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" **[Dan. 3: 14-15]**. Danger loomed for the young men.

b) *They confronted the challenge with their faith!*

Shadrach and his companions did not hesitate to let the king know that they were not afraid of him or his threats, for our adversary the devil "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and the main way to resist him is to be "steadfast in the faith" **[1 Pet. 5: 8-9]**. So, they told Nebuchadnezzar that they would not hesitate to let him know that (1) they would not worship the image of gold, (2) God whom they served would be able to and would deliver them from the burning fire, and (3) even if He did not, they *would not serve his gods nor worship the image of gold* **[Dan. 3: 16-18]**. They knew whom they had believed and were persuaded that He was able to save them.

c) *And the king fought back for pride!*

The king's pride was on the line and he needed to make an example of those three Jewish exiles to put everyone else in line. So, he ordered them to be tied up in their clothes and thrown into the burning fiery furnace which had been heated seven times more. It was so hot that even those who threw them into the fiery furnace died **[vv. 19-23]**.

d) *But Nebuchadnezzar had touched the apple of God's eye!*

God's promise is that he who touches His chosen ones touches the apple of His eye **[Zech. 2: 8]**. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished when he saw that the three young men were not only free and walking about in the fire unhurt but there was a fourth person there who was "like the Son of God." He ordered them brought out of the fire. The fire had no power over them,

“the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them” [Dan. 3: 24-27]! Has God not promised that we shall pass through fire but we shall not be burnt [Is. 43: 2]? Therefore, the king should have known better!

e) *God was glorified and the young men were promoted*

The king said, “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.” Then, he made a decree “that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against (their) God shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap, *because there is no other God who can deliver like this.*” In addition, he promoted the young faith warriors to higher positions in the province of Babylon [Dan. 3: 28-30].

3. Conclusion: Jesus, the Son of God, is with you in the fire!

The Psalmist says, “You have shown Your people hard things; You have made us drink the wine of confusion. *You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth*” [Ps. 60: 3-4]. In your hour of need and confusion, faith is the shield with which “you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” [Eph. 6: 16].

Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith. When Satan lights the burning fiery furnace for you, by way of unemployment, marital crisis, illness or religious persecution, remember that that Son of God that delivered Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego out of Nebuchadnezzar’s fire is also with you in yours. When your faith is anchored on Jesus, you have nothing to worry about. Your faith will do the talking!

Related Topic

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