

Daniel 3:16-28. ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” ¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²²The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, O king.” ²⁵He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” ²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. ²⁸Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

God stands with us.

1. Stand firm on his Word of truth
2. Stand together in the faith
3. Stand out to give God the glory

Johnny Cash used to sing a gospel song about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Some of you may remember it. It was called, 4th man in the fire. The lyrics to the refrain went like this: They wouldn’t bend. They held on to the will of God so we are told. They wouldn’t bow. They would not bow their knees to idols

made of gold. They wouldn't burn. They were protected by the Fourth Man in the fire. They wouldn't bend. They wouldn't bow. They wouldn't burn.

This song goes on to tell the remarkable account of the three men in the fiery furnace. This is the same account that we have in our lesson for us today. These men stood firm in the face of persecution and pressure. They risked their lives for their faith in the true God, and their faith was rewarded. God protected them from harm. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were Jews living in exile in the land of Babylon and had found favor in the eyes of the king Nebuchadnezzar. They had been appointed as trusted officials in the king's court and so the king was furious that some of his own officials would act and speak in such defiance to his decree. Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, ordered the fire to be stoked seven times hotter than usual. The fire was so hot that the strong men who bound these three and threw them into the fire were struck dead by the heat of the flames. Yet remarkably Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not hurt. In the middle of the fire they were walking around unbound, unharmed.

Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement for there was what appeared to be a fourth man in the fire, one whose appearance shined so bright that he appeared to be a son of the gods. Come out! He shouted. Come here! When the three men came out everyone gathered around them. Not a hair on their head was scorched by the flames, not an inch of their clothing burned, not even the stench of smoke stuck to them. In the end, the true God was honored as the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar praised the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as the Most High God, and Nebuchadnezzar praised the Most High God for sending his angel who rescued these men from the fire.

These three men put their faith in God and he delivered them in his outstanding love. They didn't bend. They didn't bow. They didn't burn. God stood with them and he will **stand with us. And so we are encouraged by their outstanding faith to stand firm on God's Word; to stand together in the faith; to stand out to give God the glory.**

This remarkable story begins with a king's idolatrous decree. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had amassed an empire of different peoples, different nations, with different languages and different religions. In an effort to unite the people of his growing empire he had a massive idol constructed. He arranged for an extravagant display of musical instruments as the signal, after the blast of music all the people of his kingdom were to bow down to the golden idol. This was not so much a religious movement but it was a carefully staged political strategy to unite the people under his rule and under Babylon and her gods.

What a lonely feeling it must have been for the three men who refused to bow. With the instruments blasting and crowds and crowds of people were bowing down these three men stood in silent defiance of the king's decree. Some artist renditions of this event show the three men standing together as the rest of the people bowed

down. We are not sure if they stood side by side or if they were scattered about in the sea of people assembled before the idol, but we do know that they stood side by side when they were brought before the king. They stood side by side and they held on to the Word of God.

They wouldn't bend in their beliefs. They must have gone through a few anxious moments, but their words show no fear only confidence in God. They knew this was the right thing to do, and they knew they weren't alone. They stood together. They stood with God and upon the Word of God and so as they stood before the king they confidently displayed their trust in the only true God. They would not bow. And so ***Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.***¹⁷ ***If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.*** ¹⁸ ***But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.***" Their trust in God was rewarded. The LORD delivered them from the fiery furnace. They would not burn.

When we think of the Reformation we sometimes think of Luther standing alone against the powers of the papacy. We think of Luther standing alone in front of the Castle Church pounding his 95 thesis to the door. We think about him on trial standing all alone before the emperor at the Diet of Worms and delivering his famous reply, "Here I stand". But Martin Luther did not stand alone to bring about the Reformation. He stood on the shoulders of Reformers before him, like John Wycliffe (who risked his life) and Jan Huss (who gave his life) because they had to speak out against the errors of the church and stand up for the Word of God. No, Martin Luther did not stand alone in his beliefs and teaching reforms, but he stood shoulder to shoulder with fellow believers who were willing to stand up for the Scriptures. He stood alongside fellow theologians like Philip Melanchthon and Justas Jonas. He stood alongside dedicated layman such as Elector Fredrick the wise, Elector John Fredrick rulers of Saxony, who protected Martin Luther for the sake of the gospel. There were these men and many others who stood shoulder to shoulder with Martin Luther and took a stand, no matter the cost, to defend the truths of Scripture.

Luther's trust in God was rewarded. God gave him the strength and the courage to stand out and stand upon God's Word of truth. God was his refuge. God was his strength. And God protected him from harm, both physical and spiritual alike. And now we are standing on his shoulders. We are standing firmly planted on God's Word. And God will be with us, just as he was with Luther, just as he was with the three men in the fiery furnace.

Sometimes, even in conservative, God-fearing, rural Minnesota, we can get that lonely feeling like we are standing alone for God's Word of truth. We may suddenly have that lonely feeling when neighbors, and friends, and people we know are voicing their opinions that are contrary to what Scripture clearly teaches. We may

feel that lonely feeling when as Christians we are pressured to compromise our beliefs to fit better into mainstream thinking, or we are pressured to compromise our beliefs to fit in better with mainstream Christianity. There is lonely feeling that often seeks to overwhelm us. *Wouldn't it just be easier to give in, wouldn't it just be easier to compromise?*

The god that we are being pressured to bow down to may not be an idol of gold, but for the sake of a false unity we are being pressured to worship something that is not the true God. Some in mainstream American Christianity and Lutheranism are fashioning for themselves a god who does not mind if we skip over parts of the Bible because popular opinion does not agree. My dear friends, we will not bend, but we will hold on to the word of God. We will not bow to the pressures of this world to compromise and making exceptions and subtractions and additions to the Bible just for the sake of unity between church bodies. Instead we will stand together on God's Word of truth. We will stand together knowing that God stands with us. And we will stand out so that the God receives the glory that he deserves. Because he stood out for us, our mighty God became man and laid down his life for us, now we gladly live for him. And God will protect us.

The Lord assures us that he is with us in our struggle. Just like the fourth man in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God is here with us. He gives us the help that we need. He sends his angels to protect us from physical and spiritual harm. He sends us his Word and strengthens our faith. He sends his Spirit to give us wisdom and understanding. He gives us his Son who rules our hearts and refreshes us when we are weary. And in his love he gives us each other. He gives fellow us Christians to remind us that we are not alone and he blesses us with opportunities to join together in worship to be refreshed, and to be renewed.

It may be easier to just follow the crowds, but God strengthens you and I so that we may stand firm. The one true God who saves you from sin and from the power of the devil will shield you from the harm of this world. He unites us in faith. He supports us. He upholds us.

We will put our trust in him and our trust will be rewarded. God will stand with us. We may suffer harm. We may have to face stinging ridicule and painful rejection, but God will deliver us. He will protect us from that which would endanger our soul, and he will bring us safely through this life to the home in heaven that Jesus has won for us. And there we will stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, with all his blessed believers and we will stand face to face with God.

My dear brothers and sisters in the faith, stand firm. We will not bend, but we will hold onto the word of God. We will not bow to anyone but the true God and God will protect us. The Lord will rescue us from every evil and bring us safely home to his heavenly kingdom. The Lord Almighty is with us the God of Jacob, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is our fortress. Amen.