As we continue with our series of messages from the Book of Daniel please turn with me in your Bibles once again to Daniel chapter three.

Today in PART TWO of our message “Courage Under Fire” we come to one of the most familiar accounts in all the Bible.

If you were like me, you first heard the biblical story of The Three Men in The Fiery Furnace when you were just a child. Many of us can probably remember the old flannel graph images in Sunday School of Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego and the fourth man in the fire.

And perhaps many of you can remember the old quartet song, “They Wouldn’t Bend, They Wouldn’t Bow, They Wouldn’t Burn.”

But as we are about to learn in today’s message, this account in Daniel chapter three is much more than a “Bible Story.” In this account the LORD teaches us some valuable truths about our own walk of faith.

Before we get into today’s message, let’s ask God’s blessings on our time of study in His word.

P R A Y E R

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In today’s message I would like to draw your attention to three important truths we learn from this account in Daniel 3.

Here is……..

**TRUTH #1: God’s People Are A PERSECUTED People**

Daniel 3:19-23 (NKJV)

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

20 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.

21 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.

22 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.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

1. When you study the history of God’s people, both in the scriptures and in secular history it is very obvious that persecution has been a major part of our existence.

   Persecution of God’s people throughout history has varied in form and intensity; from discrimination in the workplace ........to government mandates against practicing our beliefs.....to imprisonment, physical torture and even execution.

2. Godly people are an irritant to the ungodly. God’s people are
“the thorn-in-the-world’s flesh.” God’s people are “the mirror that reminds the world of the ugliness of its sinful ways.”

God’s people are a reminder to the world of just how far it has fallen from God’s standards.

God’s people are the light that exposes the world’s darkness; we are “the salt in the world’s wound of wickedness.”

3. This is why GOD’S PEOPLE ARE A PERSECUTED PEOPLE.

What happened to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego bears out this truth.

(A) First, they were persecuted for their STANDARDS. (vs.8-12)

You remember last Lord’s Day in PART ONE of this message we learned that King Nebuchadnezzar erected a 90 foot tall image of gold on the Plain of Dura, six miles southeast of the city of Babylon.

After summoning all his government officials to come to the plain of Dura for the dedication ceremony of this image Nebuchadnezzar passed a law that everyone throughout the Babylonian empire must bow down and worship this golden image any time they heard the sound of orchestra music. Failure to obey this law would result in execution by the Babylonian government.

Well we know some of the Chaldeans reported to Nebuchadnezzar that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not complying to his law by refusing to bow to the golden image.

This wasn’t something Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego decided on “the spur of the moment.” This was the standard they lived by. In other words THEIR GODLY STANDARD made them different than everyone around them.

Brothers and sisters, our GODLY STANDARD ought to “set us apart” from the rest of the world.

(B) Secondly, they were persecuted for their SAVIOR (vs. 13-15)
Remember after Nebuchadnezzar found out the accusations against Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were true, he offered them a “second chance,” “bow down to the image and you will live.”

And do you remember how Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego responded? “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. (now listen carefully to what they said next) OUR GOD WHOM WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US.”

They didn’t trust in Nebuchadnezzar as their SAVIOR, they trusted in Almighty God!

(C) And thirdly, they were persecuted for their STAND (vs.16-18)

Even when Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with execution, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden image. They were willing to take their stand regardless of the consequences or the cost.

Brothers and sisters, if you and I are going to call ourselves Christians, we must be willing to take our stand for Christ regardless of the consequences or the cost. And in so doing, we must be prepared to be persecuted to one degree or another.

4. When Nebuchadnezzar realized he was “powerless” against Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, “he snapped!” Verse 19 says, “He was full of fury and the expression on his face changed.”

Have you ever seen the “distorted” look on the face of someone filled with rage……the clinched jaw……the demonic look in their eyes……the redness in their face……the bulging arteries in the neck? Nebuchadnezzar was “full of fury!”

5. Notice Nebuchadnezzar’s FIRST COMMAND in the latter part of VERSE 19….. “Heat the furnace seven times hotter than normal.”

Many Bible scholars believe this is the same furnace used to melt the gold that was used in the building of the golden image.
If that is the case, let me give you some interesting information to consider.

-Gold melts at a temperature of 1,064 degrees Fahrenheit.

-If this furnace was heated **seven times hotter than normal** it means the temperature inside that furnace would be about **7,448 degrees Fahrenheit**.

-The average temperature used in the cremation of a body is between **1,600** to **1,800** degrees.

Now in ancient times it would be virtually impossible for Nebuchadnezzar’s men to generate the kind of temperatures he was commanding; **perhaps twice as hot as normal would be about the most they could achieve**; but they weren’t about to tell Nebuchadnezzar in his “maniacal rage” they couldn’t do what he asked. I believe those men started **shoveling coal and fanning the bellows as fast as they could go**.

6. Now notice Nebuchadnezzar’s **SECOND COMMAND** in VERSES 20,21

20 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.

21 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.

There are several things to note here: For one thing, notice Nebuchadnezzar used his “mighty men of valor” to carry out this execution. These were **the strongest men in his army**. No doubt these soldiers were used to insure that no one intervened and tried to stop the execution.

Also notice “**they bound Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego with all their clothing on.**” What was behind this? Well think about it. Clothing is highly flammable. As soon as the flames of the fiery furnace came in contact with their clothes it would create a spontaneous combustion insuring instantaneous death.
7. Normally it would be a great honor to be one of the king’s mighty men of valor, but not in this instance. Look at verse 22……..

22 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 Babylonian furnaces were built much like modern day lime kilns with the door on the top of the furnace rather than on the side.

When the soldiers opened the door on the top of the furnace the back draft was so intense it executed the executioners.

8. Verse 23 tells us……..

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were bound so tightly they couldn’t run away, and they fell into the furnace.

9. Now put all this together……..

- The furnace has been heated to a temperature much higher than normal.

- Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego are bound in their clothing

- The soldiers in charge of casting them into the furnace have been killed by the intense back draft from the flames.

- And Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego are bound so tightly they can’t possibly escape.

All these things only accentuate the miracle that is about to take place.

And this brings us to……..
TRUTH #2: God’s People Are A PRESERVED People (vs. 24-27)

Daniel 3:24-27 (NKJV)

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; 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.”

25 “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.”

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.

27 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.

1. At the bottom of the fiery furnace there was a large opening. No doubt this is where the coal or other types of flammable materials were fed into the furnace to stoke the fire.

   Apparently it was through this large opening King Nebuchadnezzar could see inside the furnace.

2. There were five things Nebuchadnezzar saw that startled him.

   (a) First, there were FOUR persons instead of THREE.
   (b) Second, not one of the four persons were BOUND.
   (c) Third, not one of the four persons were BURNED.
   (d) Fourth, all four persons were WALKING around in the FIRE.
   (e) And fifth, the fourth person looked like the SON of GOD.

3. Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were not ALONE in the fire. The God they BELIEVED in, the God they TRUSTED in, the God they had put all their FAITH in had sent a DELIVERER to be with
them in the fire.

4. Just who was this “fourth man in the fire?” Nebuchadnezzar described him as looking like “a son of the gods.” In his pagan way, Nebuchadnezzar was describing this “fourth man” as having SUPERNATURAL or DIVINE qualities.

* Some believe the fourth man was an ANGEL sent to protect Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego.

* Others believe the fourth man was actually CHRIST Himself.

My personal belief is the latter. I believe this was a pre-incarnate appearance by Jesus Christ. I believe that just as God sent His Son to deliver us from “the flames of hell”, He sent His Son in this instance to miraculously DELIVER Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego from the deadly flames of the furnace.

5. Once Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego out of the furnace, a group of his government officials were eagerly waiting to do a thorough inspection of the men.

Not only did they find them to be miraculously alive……

(a) Their bodies were not BLISTERED
(b) Their hair was not SINGED
(c) Their clothes were not SCORCHED
(d) And not a one of them even smelled like SMOKE.

6. Remember earlier Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego had told Nebuchadnezzar, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.”

Now they stood before Nebuchadnezzar and his officials as living proof that God had truly delivered them!

TRUTH #1: God’s People Are A PERSECUTED People.
TRUTH #2: God’s People Are A PRESERVED People.

Now here’s the third truth……

TRUTH #3: God’s People Are A PROMOTED People (vs. 28-30)
Daniel 3:28-30 (NKJV)

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!

29 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; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

1. Everyone there that day came away with a much greater understanding of Who God was and what God could do.

   Even though Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not certain they would walk away from the flames, they were certain God is the only True God and they were going to serve Him no matter what.

   Nebuchadnezzar began that day believing he was more powerful than the God of the Hebrews, but by day's end Nebuchadnezzar came to realize God is greater than all the kings of the earth, including himself.

2. Because they were faithful to the LORD, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego passed through the furnace and on the other side they were PROMOTED.

   There is a valuable truth we must learn from this, a truth we might not like to think about. And that is this: GOD never really uses any of us in a great way until He first takes us through the FLAMES of TRIALS.

None of us can stand on top of the MOUNTAIN until we have first passed through some VALLEYS.
None of us can know the **JOY** of **VICTORY** until we have tasted the **BITTERNESS** of **DEFEAT**.

None of us can have the **HONOR** of leading **MANY** until we have first learned the **HUMILITY** of leading a **FEW**

3. Once God brought Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego through the fiery furnace He promoted them to positions of great honor in Babylon.

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**C O N C L U S I O N**

Some of you here this morning may find yourself in a “fiery furnace.”

*Perhaps the flames of “family problems” are dancing all around you.

*Perhaps the flames of “financial problems” or “health problems” or “work-related problems” are licking at your heels.

Sometimes when we find ourselves inside of “a fiery furnace” in life we are overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness and despair.

But there’s two things you must never forget!

-First, don’t ever, ever forget, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THE FURNACE**! The Lord has promised us that He would “never leave us or forsake us, no matter what we’re going through.” The LORD is in the furnace with YOU!

-And secondly, don’t ever, ever forget WHEN THE LORD ALLOWS YOU TO GO INTO THE FURNACE, ITS NOT TO HURT YOU, ITS TO GROW YOU!

Were it not for the “fiery furnace” of trials our FAITH and TRUST in Almighty God would never grow. **Thank God for “The Fiery Furnaces of Life!”**