



SESSION SNAPSHOT

CONVICTION UNDER FIRE

NARRATIVE PASSAGE:

Daniel 3:3-18

GOSPEL FOCUS:

James 2:1-2

TAKEAWAYS:

- Your faith will be tested
- Take time to develop Godly convictions

LAST WEEK'S READING:

- Jeremiah 31:31-40; 32-33
- Jeremiah 52; 2 Kings 24-25
- Ezekiel 1:1-3; 36:16-38; 37
- Daniel 1-2
- Daniel 3-4

KNOW THE WORD

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in Babylon, and he has taken some of the Jewish nobility, including Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, into captivity. They are assigned to Nebuchadnezzar's palace. While they were in his captivity, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a colossal statue that represents a worldwide unity. He sees this as a sign to build a physical statue and force everyone to bow to it, which inspires a famous act of defiance about which we will read about today.

COMMENTARY AND STUDY MATERIALS

- v.8 "Chaldeans" here refers both to the ethnic term for the Babylonians and to the specific group of astrologers mentioned in the verses leading up to this section. Their hate for the Jewish people and their God led to the extreme charges they brought against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. "Maliciously accuse," in the original Hebrew, is the word for "chew up" or "eat their pieces."
- v.12 "These men have ignored you, the king." The Chaldeans have brought two charges against the Jewish trio: treason (not serving the king's gods) and insubordination (refusing to obey the king's command). Treason and insubordination have never received light punishment, particularly when they were against the most powerful man in the world. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew full well what they were getting into by defying Nebuchadnezzar's orders.
- v.16 When Shadrach and company replied to the king, they did not refer to him using his title or position (calling him King, Your Majesty, etc.); rather, they simply called him "Nebuchadnezzar." Anybody listening would have immediately recognized the nerve of these three Jewish men—not only did they stand accused of treason and insubordination, but they didn't even use his kingly title when addressing him. This demonstrates the depth of their devotion to God, whom they trusted with their lives and whom they would worship even if it cost them everything they had.
- v.18 "Even if He does not rescue us" is where much of the force of their response lies. They understand that 1) God does not miraculously intervene in every one of our circumstances; 2) Devotion to God is not something we cling to in order to preserve our lives or make them easier; 3) Worship is entirely about glorifying God. We often try to make worship about us; Daniel 3 teaches us that it in no way is.

STUDY THE WORD

Who would you say you looked up to most while you were growing up?

What was it about them that you wanted to emulate?

Most people have someone they looked up to growing up: a parent, a coach, an athlete, a celebrity. They had something about them that you wanted to be like. It might have been their attitude, their skill, their wit, or any of the thousands of ways we look up to other people.

Today's passage shows us some people who also possessed qualities that are worth emulating. Let's see why and discover how learning from them will change your life.

OUT LOUD, READ DANIEL 3:1-12

Nebuchadnezzar built his statue because he had a dream about it. Even though Daniel interpreted the dream about the statue as a temporary blessing that would eventually turn into a curse, Nebuchadnezzar chose to ignore the warning and, instead, put up a physical statue to commemorate his greatness.

Bowing before a statue probably isn't much of a temptation these days. What do you think a modern-day equivalent to this account might be?

When have you found it most difficult to be faithful to the Lord?

A giant statue in a field isn't necessarily the thing that would cause most people to waiver in their faithfulness to God, but we certainly have our own idols that we will defer our time, attention, and worship to. They may not even be the same things for you as they are for the person next to you. Idolatry is a condition of the heart, and it has existed since sin entered the world--the only thing that changes is the object of that idolatry.

When is a time you've felt pressured to compromise on something you believed?

How did it feel, and how did you respond?

It can be hard to stand up to the whims of the crowd. But when Nebuchadnezzar put up the statue and commanded everyone to bow to it--effectively meaning they are in submission to only him--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no option in their minds. There was no way they were going to give their allegiance to anybody but God.

What are some of the things that we "bow to" that aren't God?

OUT LOUD, READ DANIEL 3:13-18

As you read, pay special attention to the answer that the three give Nebuchadnezzar in verses 16-18.

The enemy, like Nebuchadnezzar did, tends to give us second chances to give in to temptation. What can we do to guard against that?

Have you ever seen victory over persistent temptation? Can you tell us about it?

Even when presented with an opportunity to defend themselves or go back on the stand they took, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego decided to double down on what they did. Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with death, but these three had their minds set on something bigger than his threats: the One who made him king in the first place.

What sticks out to you most about their response in verses 16-18?

How do you think “even if He doesn’t” in verse 18 relates to what faith is?

They were able to tell Nebuchadnezzar that even if God doesn’t save them from the fire, it won’t change their minds. This is because their faith was true faith: it wasn’t in God’s protection, it was in the God who protects. They put their faith into action without any hesitation, but that faith wasn’t one that comes overnight. They were prepared for the trial that they faced because they were prepared beforehand.

James 1:2 tells us to consider it joy when we face trials. How does this verse affect the way you see difficulties that come before you?

The best time to prepare for a fight is before it, not in the middle of it. What are steps that you, personally, can take to make sure you’re ready when the trials come your way?

By making spiritual discipline a daily routine, we will find that, over time, our faith--and our defenses against temptation--grow constantly. But in addition to that, looking back at the ways God has delivered you before can give you the reminder you might need about Who is really in control.

How has God seen you through a difficult situation in the past?

APPLY THE WORD

Learning how to take a stand like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did in the face of death is a process, but it is one we can begin now. We already know that things that will test our faith will come our way, so now is the best time to prepare for it.

If you don't know where to start, you could begin by simply reading Scripture on a daily basis. You can set aside five minutes to pray. Everybody has ways that they can constantly grow in spiritual discipline, becoming more prepared for the trials that will be here before we know it.

Before you close your time in prayer, encourage those in your group to take a few minutes when you are done to answer the following and share updates next week:

What is one step you can take to improve your spiritual discipline?

What plan can you put in place now to make progress on that this week?

PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK

Next Week's Reading:

- ***Daniel 5-6***
- ***Daniel 9-10***
- ***Ezra 1-2***
- ***Ezra 3-4***
- ***Ezra 5-6***