

Year 1: Session 8 – No Fear

Class 23: Daniel 3 – *Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Provide brief background on Israel and Babylon
- Highlight the parallels between this story and the crucifixion/resurrection story
- Point out how impurities getting burned out of metals by fire is analogous to the process of discipleship that clears us of fight or flight habits so that when hot-under-the-collar moments happen, the voice we trust is that of God's and not a purely biological response.

Materials needed:

1. Video clip from the movie, "Hitch" (can be seen on rfour.org)
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. At least one game of KerPlunk ([amazon link](#) – I bought mine at Target, though)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here's the opening question for today's class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question:* Do you have a story to share about fire? If so, what happened?

TRANSITION TO Activity

- For quite a stretch of the year, now, we've been looking at how there is this comparison in the Bible stories between living God's way versus living a biological fight or flight way – we've been talking about that comparison pretty much since we started reading Jesus stories.
- But that comparison actually happens in Old Testament stories as well.
- But it's a little bit different in the OT. In the Old Testament, what was often being compared was living God's way vs. living like the neighbors or enemies of Israel who had stronger / better armies and national treasures (in other words, there was God's way and then there was the way everyone else was living – which sometimes looked bigger, better and stronger).

- So in today's scripture story, we're going to see how three people choose to keep putting God and what God says first and foremost in their mind.
- And because of that choice, then these three people are able to navigate a life or death situation.
- We're going to start today with a video clip where the main character is in a stressful situation, but it is not life or death situation
- The character, Albert, wants to get the attention of a woman he knows at work, and he's hired a consultant (played by Will Smith) to help him out.
- So what we'll see is that Albert needs to keep paying attention to the consultant's voice to help him navigate the situation instead of living out his usual actions/thoughts.
- Let's see if he's able to keep listening or not

Watch Video Clip

ASK

- Did Albert listen to the consultant's voice while he was in the boardroom? (yes – maybe too much so)
- Did Albert listen to the consultant's voice after he got back to his office? (nope, not really – the consultant had to wrestle with him)
- Did the consultant help Albert get the attention of Allegra Cole? (yep)

TELL

- Today's story is long.
- It involves three young Jewish men who were taken prisoner from Israel and were made to live in exile in Babylon after Babylon had defeated Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) in battle and destroyed Jerusalem, including the first Temple.
- Because they were so smart, they were put in positions of decision-making to help make the Babylonian empire stronger. They were also given Babylonian names.
- Their Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- And what we'll see is that they'll have to decide whether they are going to keep listening to the voice of God or if they are going to give in and do what everyone else is doing – which is worshiping a statue/worshiping King Nebuchadnezzar.

READ Daniel 3:8-30 *(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse, including teachers)*

8Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. 9They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 10You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, 11and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O King. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up." 13Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. 14Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? 15Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the

statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" 16Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. 17If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. 18But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up."

19Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, 20and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. 22Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. 24Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, "Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." 25He replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god." 26Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.

28Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." 30Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

ASK

- Verse 10 – what is the decree that everyone must follow? (that everyone must bow down to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar)
- Verse 11 – What happens if you don't follow the decree? (you get thrown in the fiery furnace)
- Verse 18 – When facing the king and certain death, what do Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say they will not do? (They will not bow down to the statue)
- Verse 19 – How does King Nebuchadnezzar respond? (with rage and heats the furnace 7 times hotter than usual)
- Verse 22 – What happens to the men who throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace? (they are burned up)
- Verse 25 – What happens to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? (They are unbound and walking around in the furnace, unhurt, with a fourth person)
- Verse 28 and beyond – What is King Nebuchadnezzar's response to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not being harmed by the fire? (he blesses their God and makes a decree about their God and then promotes the three men)

TELL

- Pretty weird, eh?

- So a few things to keep in mind here
- First and foremost, let's pause to note that the Babylonian Empire was the most powerful nation in the world at that time, had destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple and had taken most of the people from Judah and moved them into a foreign land.
- This means that King Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful person in the world – and the 3 guys just said “no” to his face. That takes guts!
- So this story was told and then written by an Israelite as a reminder to other Israelites that even though things seemed bleak and awful, that God was bigger and better than this country that had overwhelmed and destroyed the Israelites.
- In a lot of ways, then, this story is a lot like the crucifixion and resurrection story:
 - Israel is not free / it is not its own country in this story, just like in the crucifixion story
 - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego choose to listen to God rather than the authorities, just like Jesus did
 - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are punished with a death sentence because of it – just like Jesus
 - And when the story should've ended with death, the story instead ends with greater/better/more life for those who chose to pay attention to God
- Another thing to pay attention to is the role of fire, here.
- Fire can be a dangerous, destructive thing – as some of our stories at the start of class illustrated.
- But for metals, fire can't hurt it – it can only melt it down and THEN it will burn the impurities that are in it. This means that once the metal hardens, it will be even stronger than before because there are no impurities in it
- So we see that analogy at work in this story, where the impurity of the ropes that bound their hands is burned off, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego themselves are not burned in anyway.
- So, just like in the movie, because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego listen to God's direction (better than Albert did), then they were able to experience a better outcome than if they had just gone along with the usual voice of survival.
- Also, like the movie, during the hardest moments (in the furnace, in the office after quitting) God/the consultant is more *present*.
- So, even though it's an old testament story, we see lots of the same things happening here as what happen in the Jesus stories and the stories of Acts.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- Let's return to this idea of metals having impurities getting burned out of them.
- Because in a lot of ways, this is similar to what happens for the disciples
- By following Jesus, the fight or flight habits slowly get removed/burned away so that when difficult / hot under the collar type of moments happen, there's nothing left but the willingness to trust God's way – which is what we eventually saw in the stories about Peter, John, Paul, and Silas.
- But that's not an instantaneous transformation.
- In the movie clip, we see how Albert doesn't fully trust his consultant – and that's sort of how it goes as a disciple as well.
- As a disciple, we will wrestle with trusting God – not unlike how Jacob did before his named was changed to Israel.
- But if we keep at it, we will finally get to that point when the obstacles in us are removed. Once that happens, these Bible stories tell us that we will then do some pretty cool things with God's help.
- So this is a very weak connection to today's theme – but let's play a few rounds of the game “KerPlunk” where we slowly remove obstacles (sticks) that then allow the marbles to move freely through the canister.

DO ACTIVITY of KERPlunk

TELL

- So, just like we removed obstacles and then the marbles could move freely within the canister, so too, can our old fight or flight habits be removed from us with God's help so that God's power and spirit can be more fully flow through us and our lives (like the marbles could better flow through the canister).

CLOSING PRAYER