

Stronger Faith

Daniel 3:1-30

9/28/03

Intro

- A wonderful lunch this week with African-American pastors

.....
Daniel is just a young boy of about 16 years of age when he is sent to Babylon in the first of the three exiles. It was the intent of Nebuchadnezzar to take the best and brightest from a country he was conquering so as to cripple that country of potential growth and strengthen his own in the process.

Daniel has been given the ability to interpret dreams and was used of God to interpret a dream of great importance for Nebuchadnezzar which outlined the future of world domination until the time of Christ.

Because of this Nebuchadnezzar elevated Daniel to a place of great authority in the kingdom. Daniel in turn asks that his three friends also be given positions. These are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.

The story found in chapter 3 is a story of strong faith and has encouraged many people throughout history who have been persecuted for their faith.

Illus – This story was written and drawn on the walls of the catacombs by believers who were being persecuted by the Romans.

These, then, are the principles of stronger faith.

I. Faith is not about me

A. Pride is the opposite of faith

- In Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2, he saw a great statue with a head of gold, but the rest was made of lesser things.
- Here, then, he decides to build an image made entirely of gold and demands that all people bow down to worship it.
- **In chapter 4, his pride suffers him a great price.**
- Pride is all about "me."

Habakkuk 2:4, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."

Illus – Daniel took no credit when God gave him the interpretation in chapter 2. Daniel 2:28,30.

B. Imagination isn't faith

- Some teachers say you can just speak what you want into being. "Speak to your wallet," they will say.
- **The problem is that this is all about me trying to convince myself "in faith."**
- God isn't in it at all.

Jeremiah 23:16, "They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD.

- The problem, then, **is you**, if you are unsuccessful.

C. It's not my will that needs to be done

- These three men **trusted in God's purpose.**

Illus – Verse 18. Even if God does not save us, we will still not bow down.

Illus – When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed to the Father...

Luke 22:42, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

II. Faith comes from God

A. These three grew in God's presence

- They grew up in a time when faith was rare in Israel.
- Someone in their lives taught them about God and their faith became strong.
- Even as young men, they separated themselves from the people around them when they asked to not be defiled by the king's food.

B. Faith comes by hearing

- This comes from a scripture that tells us that faith is a **direct product of being in the Word of God...**

Romans 10:17, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ."

- But there must be a desire to hear in order for faith to be produced.

Mark 4:23, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

C. Faith comes by example

- By their example they encouraged each other...
- **God uses** their faith to strengthen ours also...

I Corinthians 10:11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

- **By our faith,** we should encourage others, also.

Illus – we must be careful how we live, the next generation is taking their cues from us.

III. Faith is tested by fire

A. Our faith grows w/ our problems

- The faith of these men was established in the trials they endured.
- **God uses the fires in our lives to make us mightier men.**

Illus – our math ability is tested by the difficulty of the problems we can manage: addition vs. calculus.

Illus – President Bush was noticeably changed by the events of 9-11. He was strengthened and more determined in his faith than ever before.

B. Keep the faith

- Faith is something that should not be compromised.
- May we be able to say with Paul,

2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; “

Illus - In the second century, Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna was brought before the Roman authorities and told to curse Christ and he would be released. He replied, "Eighty-six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong: how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?" The Roman officer replied, "Unless you change your mind, I will have you burnt." But Polycarp said, "You threaten a fire that burns for an hour, and after a while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the judgment to come and of everlasting punishment reserved for the ungodly. Do what you wish. "

C. God does not remove our troubles

- Many people have suggested that if God were God then He would keep us from troubles.
- But God has not promised that living in faith was going to be easy.

Illus – God does not take us by the hand and lead around the trouble...(though there are some troubles that godly wisdom should keep us from)

- **But He does promise to be with us in the midst of the fire.**
- He delivers us **out** of our troubles.

Ps 34:17, “The righteous cry, and the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

Illus – the words of an old song, “God knows the way through the wilderness, all we have to do if follow.”

Conclusion

Many people desire stronger faith, but God will allow our faith to be strengthened in difficult times.