

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Stand or Compromise: What Will You Do? (Part 6)

Daniel 3:16-18

Last month we made a few comments as we began the second major part of the message. I describe verses 16-18 as **The Proving of Character**. While what the Hebrew men did in refusing to bow before the great crowd was amazing and showed strong determination, they now faced an even greater test in standing before King Nebuchadnezzar and facing the reality of being thrown into the fiery furnace. What was previously only a threat and a possibility had now turned into something real. They now faced a king that they knew was very vicious and had no problem carrying out vengeance on those that made him angry. You can see throughout the account how easily Nebuchadnezzar became mad. Verse 13 describes Nebuchadnezzar *“in his rage and fury.”* Verse 19 goes on to say that he was *“full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed.”* This was a man before whom most people would be intimidated. If some would have refused to bow, when they stood before Nebuchadnezzar, they would have quickly changed their mind because of his incredible outbursts of rage. In fact, that may have been the reason that many bowed to begin with. They either knew from experience or from word of mouth that Nebuchadnezzar was impossible to reason with. Rather than see him in anger, they bowed. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not concerned with how Nebuchadnezzar would react. They knew from personal experience, as recorded in chapter 2, how cruel Nebuchadnezzar could be. But that did not matter to them. Doing right in the sight of God was more important to them than appeasing a pagan king no matter how angry he could get. How could they stand up against a king like this? They had great character and determination.

After calming down from his initial outburst of anger that anyone

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would dare defy his order, Nebuchadnezzar offers the Hebrew men a second chance. He asks them in verse 14 if it is true that they had refused to bow before the image. Because he so often saw everyone immediately obey his orders, it seems as if Nebuchadnezzar is amazed that someone would refuse his command. Nebuchadnezzar is quick to blow up, but he also seems to calm down quickly. He does here. Perhaps after seeing them in person, he is reminded that they have been faithful in their service to him over the years. It could be that he is thinking that he can show his power to all of those that are assembled before him. By having them brought before him, he will show that he is able to make them do what he says. I doubt that Nebuchadnezzar ever imagines that anyone will refuse to do what he says when he orders them to do it in his very presence. They may have refused in the big crowd, but he will force them to bow at his command.

The second chance is offered in verse 15 which says, *“Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”* Nebuchadnezzar might be thinking that he can also make an impression on his servants and people by offering these men a second chance. Perhaps in the past, he just immediately put to death anyone that defied his order. He demands absolute allegiance, but perhaps he also wants to be known as a kind and merciful monarch. Maybe some of his advisors had suggested that he control his anger. Regardless of why he did it, Nebuchadnezzar offers the second chance and even seems to be willing to forget that they had not bowed when originally commanded to do so. He arranges everything the same as before even to the point of mentioning every instrument and having them played as the signal to bow to the image. After listing the instruments, he says, *“Well.”* The great Nebuchadnezzar is willing to forget the whole matter and everything will be fine. By saying *“well,”* Nebuchadnezzar seems to imply that he will not hold

this action against them. It is not stated as such, but it seems to me that he will even allow them to keep their same positions. Surely this kind Nebuchadnezzar will not be refused. But to let everyone know that he is kind but still demanding, Nebuchadnezzar reminds them that if the second chance is refused, they will face punishment. If they do not bow, they will be cast into the fiery furnace.

What will Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do? They had refused to bow when everyone else did, but that was in the heat of the moment. Now they have a few moments to ponder the situation. The thought could have crossed their minds that Nebuchadnezzar is acting differently than before. He seems to be kinder. While still prone to great outbursts, he shows his kindness by now offering another chance to submit to him. Perhaps this would not really be idolatry. Maybe it is just a show of allegiance to the king. Some could reason that having this in the house and bowing before it would be idolatry, but this is in public, so it is just showing allegiance to the king and his kingdom. All of the reasons that the flesh had brought to mind earlier for bowing to the image are now coming back. In addition to previous reasons, new ones now may come up. Knowing how the flesh works, some could have reasoned that because they are just before the king and his advisors that it would not have been as wrong. They had to stand before the crowd, but they could bow before the king. In reality, this reasoning is flawed and wrong. Situations do not change right and wrong. The location where it takes place does not dictate whether it is right or wrong. God's Word declares if something is right or wrong. If it is wrong to bow to the image in private, it is wrong to bow in public. If it is wrong to bow before the image when the huge crowd is there, then it is still wrong to do it before the king. I speculate about these possibilities just to let us all know that situations do not dictate right and wrong. God tells us what is right. I have heard some people argue that situations and timing may change their opinion. That should never be the case! Our actions should be based on God's eternal, unchanging Word. Where we are, or who we are with, should not affect what we do. Our actions should be dictated by God's Word.

I mention these possible thoughts about what may enter our minds during difficult situations to encourage us to be as steadfast as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. While acknowledging that we may have questions and doubts, and if in a similar situation we may wonder what to do, the passage does not indicate that these three men ever had a question as to what they should do. They knew what God had commanded concerning bowing before an image, and they were determined to remain steadfast and do what was right whether it was in a big crowd or just in a small crowd before the king. As I read the account in chapter 3, I do not think that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ever hesitated as to what they should do. They were going to do right. We must determine to do the same in every situation in our life. We must know God's Word so well that we can immediately know what our response will be when confronted with right and wrong.

After Nebuchadnezzar offers the second chance, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego show Their Fearlessness in verse 16 by saying, "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.*" The word careful means "to be necessary, or to have need of." They are responding to the offer of a second chance by saying that they do not need a second chance. They are responding to the offer to think about it again by saying that they do not need to think about it. They "*are not careful*" because there is nothing to be careful about. Do you sense their fearlessness? Here is a king that has now stated twice that he will burn them to death. The first time his servant told them what would happen. Then just moments before, the king himself reminded them that he would order their death if they did not submit to him and bow before his image. How would they respond to these threats? Would they be terrified into submission? This king, as they well knew, would not think twice about ordering their deaths. He was offering a second chance, but everyone knew that he seemed to enjoy terrifying everyone. In any test of wills, Nebuchadnezzar always won. He had the ultimate power in that he could and would order the deaths of anyone that defied him or made him mad. At this point, these three men had done

both. They had defied his order and enraged him. He calmed down enough to give them another chance, so everyone could see that they would give in to him as everyone else always did. But they were not giving in to this king.

As these words were proclaimed by these men, I can only imagine what the response was among those around the king. The advisors probably looked at one another in utter astonishment. These men were threatened with death, and they dared to say that they are not careful to answer the king. Most people are so scared of Nebuchadnezzar that they stammer and stutter in his presence and have to repeat what they say to him a couple of times so it can be understood. There did not have to be a repetition of what these men said. It was bold and clear. There was not a hint of fear. Some who heard it were probably amazed that anyone could be that fearless. They had never heard anyone who was not afraid to die. What these men are doing is beyond human comprehension. Maybe they had met and talked to some soldiers who were fearless even when going to battle. But these men did not have the appearance of warriors. They were scholars and yet they were more fearless than the mightiest soldiers. We will continue with this thought next month.