

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

The book of Daniel is filled with stories that we all know. In fact, as I have talked to Adult Bible Class teachers, more than one has commented: I think I am just going to get the flannel-graphs for Daniel in the Lion's Den. We have heard these stories from our childhood. As I began to think about this lesson, I wrestled with how I thought I might approach this text in "new and unique" ways. The reality is, no matter how many times I have heard these stories; they are still powerful reminders of God at work in the lives of people who were faithful to him.

The particular story we are looking at today—The Fiery Furnace—is not only a reminder of the power of God, but a fantastic example of faithfulness from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I want to be like these guys. I want to be able to stand in the face of danger proclaiming: I trust in God so much, that even if he does not rescue me, I will continue to trust in him.

Summary of the Text:

Again, for many of us (and those who are in our groups), this story is a familiar one. It is also one that is a consistent theme within the first six chapters of the book of Daniel. People are asked, either directly or indirectly, to do something against the commands of God. They refuse and are faced with death. God provides a dramatic rescue for them.

What is unique in this story is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response to King Nebuchadnezzar. I am reminded of the Indiana Jones movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Indiana is faced with defeating the sword carrying enemies and simply reaches for his gun, taking care of business. In the next movie, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, a similar situation plays itself out, but when Indiana reaches for his gun, it is gone. When you bring a gun to a knife fight, it is easy to talk tough. What if you bring a knife to a gunfight?

It is one thing for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to know they had a "back-up" plan, that is, they would be faithful because they knew God would rescue them. I think it is something altogether different when there is no back-up plan in place. We are less confident, less likely to speak out about our faith, I think, when we have no idea the outcome. We also have to be careful because we often think of specific ways in which we see a successful outcome. At times, a successful outcome may look nothing like we imagined.

There is also a cruel irony about how willing we are to stick to our faith. If asked: would you go to the death for your faith, I think there are many of us who would affirm that they would and, I believe, really mean it. The irony is that I find myself selling out my witness for far less. In other words, I will treat others like a commodity to be used for my financial gain (think: ugly to a waitperson because he or she was slow getting your food to you) even as I say I would die for Jesus. At times, I want to die for Jesus, just don't ask me to live for him.

The other part of this, and I think what makes this story so powerful, is that it speaks not to doing the right thing so that God would bless you, but doing the right thing because it is the right thing. We too often figure out ways to quantify the things we have done for God in order to total up our "faithfulness quotient." The often unspoken assumption is that anyone above a certain number has reached the goal. God has to bless us, guaranteed, right? We have done x number of good things! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's wiliness to not bow before the golden idol even if it meant sure death tells us of the importance of doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do.

LESSON #19

Date: 1/27/2013

Text: Daniel 3.1-18

The Story: Chapter 18

The Big Picture: It is easy for us to follow down a difficult path when we know the destination. What are the results are completely unknown? What do Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us about following Jesus no matter what?

Materials Needed: none

Preparing for the Group Time:

This week I would suggest you spend some time looking at the ways you allow pressures and situations in your life to prevent you from fully living out a faithful witness to the power of God. Perhaps another way to frame this is to ask yourself: what little things keep tripping up my faith walk? How can you be reminded of these things so as to not be distracted by them?

Living the Story

Lesson #19
Text: Daniel 3.1-18

Lesson Outline:

As you begin your group time, ask people a series of questions intended to see how little they would be willing to receive to do something really outlandish. Here are a couple of examples:

- Would you wear a pink tutu to work for a million dollars? \$100? \$10?
- Would you come to church in your pajamas?
- Would you go a month without showering or shaving?
- What is the worst job you can think of? Would you do it for a week for a million dollars?

Try to think up other things that might appeal to your group. You might allow everyone to raise his or her hand for each monetary level, seeing who would do each job/task for the least amount of money. Someone once said that everyone has a price. The point of this exercise is to discover what each person's price is.

Go through the discussion questions.

Close with a time in prayer.

Discussion Questions:

Now that we know your price for wearing pink tutus, what about your faith? How much would it take for you to denounce your faith?

Read Daniel 3.1-18. Ask the group: what stands out to you about this story? What do you think you would have done if you were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

How does our awareness of the faithfulness of God in the past help us affirm our faith in difficult situations in the future? What if we had no examples of the faithfulness of God to lean on?

We often say we would not denounce our faith for a million dollars, but often find ourselves wrestling with doing so in simple situations, things that in this scenario might be considered a couple of bucks. Why do you think that is the case?

What does it say about us that the risk of death does not phase us, but being asked to alter our life does?

How can we become more like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that is, willing to say we will be faithful even if God does not come through as we expect him to?

For the Children:

Because our children are familiar with this story, give them some time to tell the group about what happens in the text. Ask them why this story is significant and what about this story is important. Let your children teach you here. Then, as they hear you discuss the questions, they learn from you. I think it is important for our children to recognize that even though we admonish them to be faithful followers of Jesus, we too wrestle with doing so and need encouragement.

Living the Story:

We want to be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow down to "idols" that are put before us. I think the key for us is to recognize the ways we bow down to things other than God. Unfortunately, they may not be the big

things. Too often, the little things trip us up. This week, spend some time thinking about the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. As you do, also think about ways you choose to follow something or someone other than God. Then, ask yourself: what would it take for me to remove these things from my life? Ask your group to help you with this process.

Next Week:

Next week's lesson will be from *The Story* chapter 19.