

INTRODUCTION:

Today, I would like to share with you a story:

The story begins with a king who is beginning his reign over a country.

- This king wanted to establish strength in his kingdom by choosing the most gifted princes of his newly won territories and train them for political leadership.
- He had the chief of his officials bring in some of the princes and sons of noble birth from two of the countries that his country had recently overtaken.

These men were chosen because they were good looking and intelligent.

- They were to be given educational training for 3 years in order to prepare them to be leaders along with the king.
- These men were going to be trained to become the best of the best of the best!
- The king provided the choicest of foods and drink.
- And after these men had received a fair amount of training they were to be presented to the king for his final judgment regarding who would become the king's personal servants.

Four of the young men who were brought in, were faced with a dilemma, when they were offered the choice foods.

- You see they were devout religious men who couldn't eat this food in good conscience.
- The food had been dedicated to pagan gods and eating it would constitute a violation of their vows of consecration.
- The ceremonial significance of food, clean or unclean, was very important to them.
- Eating this food dedicated to the pagan gods would be a breach of faith with their God.
- They were faced with the decision to decline the food and risk the wrath of the king; or to eat the food and violate their consciences.

Some of you at this point may recognize that this isn't just a fairy tale.

- This is a story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- The king that I have been referring to is the king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar.
- He brought in 3,000 princes and nobles from the lands of Israel and Judah.
- Ashpenaz was the commander of the officials that was assigned to the task of preparing some of these men to be presented to Nebuchadnezzar.

We also find that Ashpenaz found the names of these 4 men to be unacceptable.

- Any name ending with an "el" (Like Daniel & Mishael) is a reference to God.
- Any name ending with an "iah" (Like Hananiah & Azariah) is a reference to Jehovah
- These four men, therefore, all had godly names.

Ashpenaz apparently didn't want the king to be offended and so he gave them Aramaic names.

- Daniel was to be known as Beltshazzar. While the other three were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- These four men demonstrated great acts of faith in the 1st three chapters of the book of **Daniel**.

Before we take a closer look at them, I would like to share with you a short history lesson on the significance of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign over Babylon.

- During his 44 year reign as king... the Babylonian Empire reached its greatest strength.
- Nebuchadnezzar was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem.
- He built Babylonia, the capital city of Babylon, into one of the leading cities of the world with irrigation canals and amazing structures.
- He built the famous hanging gardens for his wife, a Median princess, who was homesick for her homeland. How is that for a nice gift?
- His Hanging Gardens have been known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

A question we might ask is... How did he build this empire?

- These facts about his kingdom are historic facts that are not necessarily found in the Bible... But how did Nebuchadnezzar become so powerful?
- The answer is... (Wrap your mind around this...) Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were four of the men who helped him build this empire!
- They were some of his top leaders!
- Nebuchadnezzar selected the some of the most intelligent men as diplomatic leaders, and he had well-trained consultants... Those consultants and leaders are who I would like us to consider this morning.
- He was a brilliant leader who was greatly feared by many.

Let's go back to the early stages of his reign as king and look at the decisions he would make regarding who would help him build the kingdom.

- Let us consider these four men, who were being faced with a decision which could cost them their lives.... Eat the food...or face the wrath of the king.
- What decision would you make if you were there?
- Would you give your respect to the King of kings or to king Nebuchadnezzar?
- Let's take a look at Daniel 1 and see what they decided... read with me **Daniel 1:8-20...**

8 But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, 10 and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,

12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.

16 So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

17 As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

18 Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service.

20 As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm.

We find then, that Daniel asked the commander of the officials to provide an alternate diet.

- **Verse 9** tells us that God granted favor and compassion to Daniel.
- The commander, however, was concerned that they would look less healthy than the other men.
- He was afraid that the king would have his head for allowing them to have food other than his appointed daily rations.
- In **Vs 11** we see that the commander “passed the buck”.
- He appointed an overseer over the four men.
- Daniel asked this overseer to give them ten days on vegetables and water and then compare them to the other men on the king’s rations.
- He says if you are not happy with our appearance at that time, you may “**deal with your servants according to what you see.**”
- After 10 days what was the result?
- **Verse 15** says their appearance was “**better**” and they were “**fatter**” than all the other youths.
- God not only granted them this health, but he also granted them with a great deal of wisdom.
- Daniel had a special ability. He could interpret visions and dreams.
- King Nebuchadnezzar was very pleased with them and so they entered into the king’s personal service as consultants.

This morning, I would like for us to consider the character of these four men.

- As we take a look at the heart of their character, I believe that there is a lot that we can learn about conviction.
- These four men were willing to do whatever it took to keep within the Lord’s will.
- I am confident that there are not any circumstances in which they would have eaten the King’s choice foods.
- I believe this primarily because of the first few words in **verse 8**... “**But Daniel made up his mind**”
- He made up his mind not to defile himself and then he sought permission.
- He made up his mind to do what was right, before he knew the consequences.
- Even though the king’s own commander of his officials feared his life, we can be certain that Daniel was not willing to compromise.
- He had “**made up his mind**” and he was willing to die for his convictions.
- We can be sure, that it is because of these convictions that God granted them with good health and wisdom.

When I think about the word conviction, I am reminded of an ecology teacher that Traci once had.

- She had some very strong views about preserving the world’s ecosystem.
- She was concerned about the world’s resources and was convinced that unless we make some major changes, our children’s children are doomed to a bleak future.
- To her, swimming pools are a detestable waste of water and she even hates it when people take baths, because of how much water it takes.
- She doesn’t buy anything new if at all possible.
- She sifts through people’s garbage to keep recyclables out of the landfills.

Now... I’d like to make one thing clear, I don’t think there is anything wrong with doing these things...

- But, she was using her position to force everyone in the class to do what she wanted...
- She had her entire class out picking up garbage, stopping soil erosion on campus and out in a forest preserve, pulling up an invasive plant called garlic mustard.

- She made Traci and the rest of her class do a report, which included a detailed account of how each student will take steps to reduce pollution and recycle.
- The teacher also expressed that if they didn't value the same opinion as her on that report, that they would surely get an "F".
- The point that I am just trying to illustrate here is that she was very convicted to this cause.
- Just like Daniel, she had made up her mind to do whatever it took!

Isn't it a shame that people do not have the same strong conviction for knowing God and understanding scripture.

- Do you have this kind of conviction in your Christian walk?
- What steps are you willing to take to be His faithful follower?
- Are you willing to do whatever it takes to keep within the Lord's will?
- Have you made up your mind like Daniel did?
- Are you willing to die for your convictions?

As we continue on in our story, we learn that because God was with these men, incredible things happened for them and God took care of them.

- The Apostle Paul experienced the same thing! Remember what he wrote to the Romans?
- "...*all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord.*" (**Romans 8:28**)
- "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" (**Philippians 4:13**)
- We should all be thankful that God blesses those who are committed to Him.
- Think for a second about all that was done for these four men....
- Daniel could interpret dreams, Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men.
- Daniel made the other three administrators over the province of Babylon.
- God really blessed them because of their convictions.
- Won't he also bless us today, if we are committed to serving Him? I believe He will!

But we begin to see in **Daniel 3**, that Nebuchadnezzar was doing the same thing to his country as Traci's teacher was doing to her.

- He was forcing them to do something he wanted them to do, instead of allowing them to make their own decisions.
- As we know Nebuchadnezzar loved to impress people!
- This is obvious based on the Hanging gardens and the aqueducts etc...
- Perhaps he was trying to find something to unify his people, but he built a huge golden image that was about 90 feet tall.
- He built it in a place that could easily be seen from miles and miles around with its golden body shimmering in the sunlight.

In this passage, we see that he held a dedication ceremony to the image and assembled all of the leaders of his provinces:

- And he gave them some instructions... Let's look at those instructions now... **Daniel 3.4-7...**

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language,

5 that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

6 "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

7 Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

So we find here that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are now stuck between a rock and a hard place.

- Once again they are being asked to violate their convictions.
- As the story goes on, we learn that they did not bow down.
- Some of the Caldeans, who were probably jealous of their rapid promotions, told the king.
- Nebuchadnezzar was mad! He ordered that they be brought to him.

He asked them in **Verse 14ff** if it is true that they did not bow down?

- And then he offered a second chance to bow down.
- He tried to intimidate them by warning that if they do not bow down this time, he will cast them into the fiery furnace.
- In the face of certain death, they responded with a response that he was not expecting.
- Please read with me, **Daniel 3:16-17...**

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.

17 "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king."

King Nebuchadnezzar was probably the most powerful man in the entire world at this time and yet S/M/A responded to him with an amazing level of confidence.

- So... now we are seeing another part of the character of these men.
- We don't need to answer you, because our God will deliver us!
- You may be a very powerful man, but you can't force us to compromise, what we know is the right thing to do.
- Look at the confidence of these guys! "*we do not need to give you an answer... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.*"

When we consider the conviction and the confidence of these men, what can we apply to our lives today?

- First and foremost, we are serving the same God and we can know that the God we serve '*is able*' to get us out of any problem that this world may throw at us.
- We can overcome any trial and any temptation with his strength.
- If only we could be as strong as these men!
- We could face the world confidently saying, "*our God whom we serve is able...*"

Not only can we be confident that God is able, but we can also know that He "*will deliver us.*"

- Does that mean we will be delivered from hard times or temptations?
- Are we going to be given the "easy life"?
- Well, the answer to that question is found in another question... were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego given the easy life?
- If we remain convicted through our troubles, we can have confidence that God will be with us!

When King N. confronted them they held to their convictions and turned everything over to God.

- **Verse 18** contains one of the most courageous statements in the entire Bible.

“But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your god or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

They stood up to this Terrorist like character and said to his face, you can't make me!

- We are not going to serve your gods!
- Most people, when confronted by someone of great power, would give in to their fear.
- King N. was trying to scare them into conforming to his worship, but they would not budge.
- They didn't make a big scene out of the food issue and they didn't make a big issue out of not bowing down.
- The Caldeans had to turn them in or King N. wouldn't have even known.
- They humbly did what was right in a very non-confrontational way!
- When I read in **Verse 19** that the kings “***facial expression was altered***”, I can't help but to smile, thinking about the look on his face.
- He was so mad, he had the furnace heated up seven times hotter than usual and had his valiant warriors bind up and cast the three men into the furnace, sacrificing their own lives because of the heat.

I am certain that his facial expression REALLY changed, when he saw them walking around freely in the furnace with an image like a son of the gods.

- When he saw that the Most High God delivered them from the fire.
- Not one hair on their heads was singed and they didn't even smell like smoke.
- In **Verse 28**, King N. responds to this miracle...

28 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

King Nebuchadnezzar of all people, summed up the entire event, as good as any godly man could have.

- They were delivered, because they put their trust in God.
- And they refused to put any other gods before God almighty.
- Amazing things happen when we put our trust in God.

SUMMARY:

A person who is willing to stand up for their convictions even in the face of death, who will confidently defend what is right, and will have the courage stand up against evil can only do so if they are thoroughly trusting in God.

I am reminded of a passage in **Psalm 62** which does an excellent job of pointing out an attitude that we should have in the face of hard times or difficult decisions.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.

7 On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.

8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

Have you put your trust in God?

- If you have not put you complete trust in God in the way that these four men have, you have not lived up to what God wants from you.
- I encourage you to turn your life over to God today... Please let us know if we can help in any way.