

August 16, 2019

Warm hellos to you dear brethren, and spiritual family here on the Coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and scattered children of God.

My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed!

But if not, be it known...

Earlier in the week, I sat down one night, and picked up my smart phone to check my email, and was sent a link to recorded footage of several lions attacking a Water or Cape Buffalo, one of the big 5 in Africa. (In Africa, the Big Five game animals are the lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and Cape buffalo. The term was coined by big-game hunters, and refers to the five most difficult animals in Africa to hunt on foot, but is now also widely used by safari tour operators.)

What immediately came to mind was one of my favorite verses in God's Word, as well as a memorably recorded incident and story from the Word of God.

"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." (Proverbs 28:1)

We all recall this story from the ancient pages of the Bible. The trumpets sounded! Harps, flutes and voices quickly combined as the world's most powerful nation began to sound a single message to the people of its kingdom, Bow down to the King's idol, and do it now!

Fearing the anger of their King, the captive people bowed down to this giant golden idol, thereby solidifying their loyalty to this great King Nebuchadnezzar. An entire empire literally kneeled before a statue he had built.

And what is recorded, is indeed an entire empire. Well, almost, with three exceptions. While the rest of their friends and fellow subjects turned their faces toward the ground, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah stood defiantly. Like the King's musicians, they too were sending a message. We will neither bow down nor kneel to your idol!

The news quickly spread and then came back to the king provoking his anger. Several jealous colleagues informed Nebuchadnezzar "that three of the Jews that he had instated as officials in his empire were openly in defiance, refusing to bow at his command."

With rage, the king immediately sent for them and demanded an explanation. Had they really stupidly defied his orders as the most powerful man in the world? He was their king was he not?

The King then repeated his ultimatum that these three young men knew all too well—*they had a choice, they could either bow down to his statue with the rest of the kingdom, or they could be burned alive in this blazing fiery furnace.* I'm sweating just thinking of the intense heat.

We need to look at a bit of history. God had given His people, the nation of Israel, warning after warning to choose Him as their God. Just like the prophets of Baal and Elijah at Mount Carmel, they had a choice. Time after time, they rejected Him in favor of idols or carved figurines—choosing to worship creation over the Creator as we read in Romans 1:25. There are so many stories recorded where this rejecting God took place.

Years in the future, a famous deacon of the Bible, Stephen, would correct the Israelite leaders *“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51).* It was an all too common pattern indeed.

You and I know, that our Creator is patient and slow to wrath, but He will not endure sin forever. It's something man seems to just never learn.

And so, after decades of second chances, God removed His protection from the nation and allowed other nations to take this once great people into captivity. Assyria would upset and ravage the majority of Israel first. The nation of Babylon would follow in their footsteps, conquering what few remained. It was a very sad time in history indeed. This will be replicated again if we do not heed God's warning.

Among those brought into captivity as property by the mighty Babylonians were four men you and I probably know well: Daniel (who we all remember from his situation in the lion's den) and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (who most remember from their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego).

It didn't take much time before these four faithful men of God became noticed by their captor, King Nebuchadnezzar.

You'll recall that via the inspiration of God, Daniel was able to both succinctly describe and then interpret a dream that the king had, and it was something impossible for the “wise men” of the Babylonian empire. This quickly earned Daniel a promotion from being a captive to *“ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:48).*

The king then also *“set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon” (Daniel 2:49).*

The story might have finished right there, if not for this tiny problem. Nebuchadnezzar was not a ruler who had the slightest clue what “humility” was. Becoming the most powerful man in the world had blossomed and expanded his ego to huge proportions.

Once the approximately 90 foot tall idol of gold was complete, and he sent out the orders to worship it or receive the penalty of death whenever the royal musicians gave the cue, the very thought that even three of his highest rulers would openly defy his command was simply unacceptable. He was absolutely livid.

He summoned these three men and reiterated, that their continued refusal would end with agony as they were thrown to the bottom of a fiery furnace.

Now the story becomes even more interesting and poignant.

This king appeared to enjoy making gruesome examples of any who opposed him—so I’d say that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were not having this discussion in private. All was right out in the open for all to see to make a point.

When the king shouted in a ridiculous rage, *“And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”* (Daniel 3:15), no doubt the entire group of officials were quiet, waiting to hear how these three rulers would answer. Not uncommon is it, even today?

Would these men defy the king to his very face? Would they be that bold and foolish to sign their own death sentences? So many things go through my mind as I ponder this situation.

Most would reason that their only hope was to prostrate themselves like everyone else, but the three men were not interested in appeasing any man when it came to this choice.

We find their answer recorded in God’s Word, preserved for us down through the ages as a defining example of what it means *to be* a Christian—and what it means to be as bold as a lion. So, here is what they said to the king:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up. (Daniel 3:16-18)

No surprise here, but King Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage, intent on making the consequences of disobedience plain. How dare they question the king!

They stoked the furnace seven times hotter than usual, in fact so intense that some of the guards or soldiers in Nebuchadnezzar’s army died just by getting close enough to the furnace to toss in these “recalcitrant Jews”.

Then when the king peered into the furnace, and noticed that the three men were walking amidst the flames unharmed... and in the company of a fourth figure he could only describe as looking “*like a son of the gods*” (Daniel 3:25, New International Version), he was immediately stunned.

Arrogant as he was, the king of Babylon was forced to come face-to-face with one simple fact. There was a Being obviously more powerful than him, and that Being didn’t approve of Nebuchadnezzar’s idol in any way shape or form.

The king called for Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to come out of the furnace. He then promoted them, and made a kingdom wide decree “that anyone who dared speak against the God of these three men would be sentenced to death”.

Okay, so what’s the point, and how does that apply to you and me?

God’s miraculous rescue of His three faithful servants has made this story both familiar and a favorite, but the real lesson lies in what happened *before* they were tossed into the furnace. In fact, the real lesson for you and me lies in these simple words from the men’s response. “But if not, be it known...”

In these few words is a mindset that any Christian who hopes to capture the boldness of a lion must have a firm belief that serving God is *unconditional*.

Let’s take a look at their words again. They begin by expressing their complete faith in God’s ability to save them from Nebuchadnezzar’s anger.

This arrogant king of Babylon saw himself as more powerful than any of the gods the people he ruled over served. In fact, he was so delusionary in thinking he was omnipotent and no one could possibly stop him, that he lost common sense.

When he asked these three men, “And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” he wasn’t actually wanting a response. It was through the lens of someone who had lost sight of God.

When the three men responded with, “Our God...,” it sent him into a maddening rage. Go figure.

If our story had finished here, it still would have made for a powerful example—but what makes it remarkable is what came after. The “But if not, be it known.”

Let’s dig a little deeper into the story and the lesson for you and me.

The Biblical account here in Daniel 3 mentions no record of a dream given to His three servants, letting them know that they would be indeed rescued by God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego did not have the exact answer whether God would save their skin so to speak, and bring them alive from the furnace. What they did know, was that He was able, but they didn't know for sure that He would. Are we any different at times?

So we see them answering the most powerful ruler on Earth, that even if God doesn't deliver them from the fire, and they were burnt to a crisp, they would not bow down to this idol.

I'd like us to consider, that not knowing if a divine rescue was imminent, it would have been easy for most people to justify bowing down to this statue. After all, they wouldn't really be worshiping the idol, right? God would know their hearts, right?

They'd just be keeping out of trouble so that they could keep on worshiping the real God later!

And besides that, if they were to die, that would be three fewer followers of God in a pagan nation ruled by a godless government, right?

So really, some might reason, it was in everyone's best interest, especially God's, that they stay alive—and if that means a teeny bit of compromise, then so be it, right?

That's where no, it is not right, it is wrong. Wrong no matter how we look at things.

One of the many lessons in this story is serving God must not be conditional. Following God will never be a matter of, "I'll serve God if..."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego understood. The option of "We'll only refuse to worship your statue if God rescues us" wasn't one. It didn't matter if God saved them or not—they were not going to bow down to this other god, period.

They wouldn't compromise, or blur the guidelines set by God, no matter the cost to their positions or even their lives.

And it's because of this unconditional obedience to God that they were able to be bold as a lion before King Nebuchadnezzar—the most powerful man in the world.

Here's a question my friends. What about you and me?

Okay, today we might not face anything quite as dramatic as being tossed into a fiery furnace.

But you know, you and I do face pressure to compromise—to soften or blur the lines or choices that God has set for us.

If we are not careful we might convince ourselves that hey, it's okay, that God will understand because the ends justify the means, or because we're not 100 percent sure that God will save us so it's better to do our part better and fend for ourselves. Only logical right?

Here's the problem. If we take that step, and choose to compromise even the slightest on God's standards and laws, we'll be transformed from the fearless, bold lion to what might more realistically be a little cat or kitten.

Oh, it might not show immediately in our outward appearance. We may even manage to trick some people into thinking otherwise, but in our hearts, we'll know. In Christ's time this was the problem of the Pharisees.

As humans, you and I find that we are often not bold. Frankly, if we are honest, we can be just the opposite. Ever been called a "Fraidy Cat" as a child? That means you were scared or afraid to do something. It's just the opposite of being bold.

When we choose to resist the pressure to compromise—whether or not we've not stood up before—we establish ourselves as being bold as a lion.

When we choose to stand up for God's way, especially when we know it may cost us dearly, we not only maintain our integrity before God, but we also set an example of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ.

King David was recorded in a verse that sums it all up. It was no doubt going through the minds of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego when they made their famous reply.

David wrote, *"In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* (Psalm 56:11).

When you and I trust God, and I mean truly trust Him, then we know that our fellow man can do nothing more to us than what God allows. More than that, we know that whatever God allows, however little we understand it, is for our good. Secure in this knowledge, we can be bold as a lion. Romans 8:28 is a promise. Do we believe it?

As mentioned earlier in this story, the names you likely know these three men by are Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. These were the names *given to them by their Babylonian captors* and the names that were recorded in this example.

Because of this, it's easy to overlook their real given names—names that rightly give glory to their and your and my God.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah respectively mean "God has favored," "Who is like God?" and "God has helped."

Even the names of these three men powerfully reflect their confidence and faith in God's ability to deliver His people. Talk about being bold! Names are important to God.

At the end of this recorded example, God rescued His three faithful and confident servants and even caused Nebuchadnezzar to promote them and proclaim God's greatness throughout his empire.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were bold as a lion. Will you be? Will your words be "But if not, be it known..." when it comes to obeying and trusting God?

...as I close this letter, as I do every Friday evening...as we enter His Sabbath...reflect on this with me, will you?

And again, may God continue to richly bless you. Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily! Please do pray for us as well.

-*Scott Hoefker* (Pastor and wife (Gayle) The Living God Ministries Gulf Coast)

The schedule for this week's Sabbath is:

August 16th / Friday: Gifts for the Lord/ Praises/Gifts and Prayers to welcome God's Sabbath
7:00 pm (via Teleconference live connect with Stephen Glover and Friends.)

August 17th / Saturday: Spirit and Truth Worship Services 10:15 am, with local services held in Montgomery with the message by Stephen Glover. (All others are welcomed and encouraged to connect live to Worship Services via our normal phone conference). There will also be local services in Mobile this Sabbath as we'll combine the brethren in Spanish Fort with *The Church of God Mobile, Sabbath Day*. There will be a potluck fellowship meal shortly after the morning Worship Service there. All are welcomed to stay and enjoy.

August 17th / Saturday: Sabbath Fellowship Study (Interactive Bible Discussion) **4:00 pm** from Spanish Fort with Scott Hoefker. (connecting live with all others via telephone conference).

Next Sabbath's Schedule for TLGM Gulf Coast:

August 23rd / Friday: Gifts for the Lord/ Praises/Gifts and Prayers to welcome God's Sabbath
7:00 pm (via Teleconference live connect) with Stephen Glover and friends.

August 24th / Saturday: Spirit and Truth Worship Services 10:15 am, with local services held in Montgomery with the message by Stephen Glover (All are welcome and encouraged to connect live to Worship Services via our normal phone conference). There will be no local services in Spanish Fort as the Hoefkers will be traveling to visit the *Christian Church of God* in Pearl, MS.

August 24th / Saturday: Sabbath Fellowship (interactive Bible Discussion) 4:00 pm *from* Montgomery with Whit Moorer (connect live to all others via telephone conference).

Telephone Ministry (English): Call **1-712-770-4700**; then, when asked, enter Code **112165 #** to join.

(Note: All callers are muted and must press *6 to comment and *6 to resume mute.)
All times are listed in Central Standard Time zone.

Our Daily Bread Recordings

Sunday through Saturday / Our Daily Bread [listen anytime 24/7 to a recorded 15 minute message] Call 1-712-770-4709 (note this call in number is different and ends in "9"), then when asked, enter code 112165# [reference code numbers are on "Spiritual Fellowship Opportunities" on this website <http://www.tlgministriesgc.org> or at "Resources/Archives" on <http://www.haggai114.net>]

Daily Fellowship Opportunities

Sunday – Friday / **Morning Sacrifice** (Prayers & Scripture Reading) at 6:00 a.m.

Sundays / **History & Background of the Gospels** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. [Scott & Friends]

Mondays / Africa Discipleship at 7:00 a.m. [Glovers & Moses]

Almond Branch Fellowship at 6:30 p.m. (Interactive) (Stephen & Friends)

Tuesdays / **Haggai Fellowship** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. (Interactive) [Stephen & Friends]

Wednesdays / Africa Discipleship at 7:00 a.m. [Glovers & Moses]

1st & 3rd Wednesday / **Sons of God Fellowship** (Young men training) at 6:30 p.m. [Stephen & Friends]

2nd & 4th Wednesday / **Lydian's Fellowship** (Ladies) at 6:30 p.m. [Esther/Gayle & Friends]

Thursdays / **Mt. Carmel Fellowship** (Interactive) at 6:30 p.m. [Hoefkers & Friends]

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