

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Vol. 2 No. 17 – Aug. 29, 2008

Heb. 11:6 – *And without faith it is impossible to please God.*



THE FAITH OF SHADRACH

Names are an interesting phenomenon. At different times in history, different names were popular then later became unpopular again. Wait long enough and the cycle will return and the unpopular names will, once again, become popular. At times, we have borrowed names from our neighbors in Africa, Russia, and various other places to christen our children. In the 1970's, when my children were born, Jennifer was a popular name. No one named their child Emma. In fact, the only Emma's at that time were among the elderly. It was a name from another era. Now, I just read where Emma is the most popular name for baby girls. Go figure!

Why are there no Shadrach's, Meshach's, or Abednego's? Is it because of the stigma attached to their names? The name Shadrach does immediately bring to mind the fiery furnace, doesn't it? I understand why Christians do not name their daughters Jezebel or their sons Ahab. But why not Shadrach? What's the matter with that name?

How many of us would like to be a King David? A Moses? By all means, yes. How about Peter, Paul, James, or John? Definitely – all mighty men of God. Samson? Yes! Daniel? Absolutely – that is, except for the lion's den. Shadrach? Uh ... well, I don't know. Maybe not. Unfortunately, all that most of us know about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is their trip to the fiery furnace. Let's explore their history a little.

It was not only Daniel, but his three friends, as well, who defied the king's orders and asked to be fed only vegetables and water prior to being presented to the king. The Scripture says that God gave all four of them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And all four of them were chosen by King Nebuchadnezzar to enter his service. Remember, these young men were exiles, living lonely lives in a foreign country, a country that had defeated their people.

How many of us, under those same circumstances, would be spending our time having a pity party? Would we be willing to defy our

captors and allow God to get glory out of our lives in the manner in which they did? These young men had a powerful faith and trust in God, even to the point of endangering their lives rather than being disobedient to that which they knew was God's will.

Later, after Daniel had been granted time by the king to interpret his dream, he went to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and **the four of them pleaded with God in prayer so that they would not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.**

Again, after a decree had been created that demanded of every subject, adoration and worship to the king's golden image and to his gods, it was Daniel's three friends who were singled out.

Dan. 3: 8-12-*At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever*

does not fall down will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

What powerful verses of Scripture. These men were exiles in a foreign land. God had greatly blessed them by raising them up in the eyes of King Nebuchadnezzar to where they were chosen over citizens of Babylon to serve in the king’s court. They ruled over Babylon. They had become privileged citizens, living better than any others among their Jewish brethren. **Their lifestyles and, in fact, their entire lives were on the line as they stood before the king because of their refusal to serve his gods.** But they had knowledge that only those who have yielded themselves completely to God receive. They knew that they were really citizens of a better place. They knew that the God they served was capable of saving them from sure death – a death that would be slow and agonizing. **But they also knew that, even if God chose not to save them, they would not turn their backs on He whom they had chosen to serve.**

Is that faith or what? But now their faith was really going to be tested. After all,

they were special leaders in the local political system. The King might well decide to grant them leniency because of their positions. But suppose he didn’t. What would they do then?

Dan. 3: 13-18-*Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”*

Nebuchadnezzar was furious with rage. Certainly, the three young Hebrew men noticed that. Certainly, they realized that their elitist lifestyles were in danger of being stripped from them. Certainly, they knew that King Nebuchadnezzar would do that which he threatened to do.

Now they were faced with the trial of their lives. **It is one thing to stand for God boldly when you are at the pinnacle of success. But what do you do when you are threatened with sure death,** a slow, agonizing

death – and one that you know will be carried out to the fullest?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Wow! Most of us do not have to go through trials such as did these courageous three men. But we do have to go through trials. These trials are to strengthen our faith and to bring glory to God. And though they may seem as difficult as a fiery furnace while we are in the midst of them, God always has a way out. He is faithful. If, in His perfect wisdom, He allows us to go through a difficult time, He has purpose in it. And the purpose is to draw us closer to Him, to conform us to the likeness of Jesus.

These courageous young men did not know what would happen to them if God didn’t save them from the fiery furnace. Jesus hadn’t come in the flesh yet. Heaven wasn’t promised to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But

the Holy Spirit of God did fill them with the ability to walk where few would dare to tread. **The fact that they did not know how things would turn out made no difference.** They, like the many persecuted Christians who would follow them, years later, had gotten hold of the one true God – God had a grip on them; and they had a grip on Him – and they would not let go under any circumstance.

We know how the story ends. The fire was hot enough to burn up some of Nebuchadnezzar's men; but it did not burn up the three young Hebrews. Jesus, Himself, stood with them in the fire, and when the king called them out, they stepped out completely unscathed, with not even the smell of fire on their clothing. Nebuchadnezzar then promoted them to a higher place in his kingdom. Oddly, we never read another word about these three mighty men of God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego embodied all that comprises true faith and trust. They knew their God. They knew that if He chose to, He would rescue them. **They did not look at the circumstances surrounding them at all.** They did not envision the licking red-hot flames from the furnace. They saw only their God. They knew that if God chose to rescue them, it would be a complete and a perfect rescue. And if

He did so, they wouldn't even be singed by the fire. **And they knew that if He chose not to rescue them, they could still trust Him, though they knew not what would be the result.** That, friends, is absolute faith. That is absolute trust.

Shadrach and his friends knew something that each of us must also know: Victory always comes at the end of perseverance; and never prior to the end of it.

KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS

The one thing that these men did was to keep their eyes on God. How often we find ourselves in difficult circumstances and we call out to the Lord to rescue us, but we do not put our eyes on Jesus.

Heb. 12:2-*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*

When we are in a pickle, we need Jesus to come and rescue us. But we cannot expect to find Jesus if we continue to look at the circumstances. What brought about those circumstances? Maybe it was sin? Maybe it was the consequences of our disobedience? Maybe it was the devil attempting to dislodge us from our relationship with the Lord. And if that was the case, God allowed it so that He could draw us closer to Him. But we can't continue to look at

the devil and expect to find Jesus. We must fix our eyes on Jesus. **He is the author, the originator of our faith; and He is also the perfecter, the completer of our faith.** And guess what is at stake in those difficult circumstances? It is our faith. Our faith is being tested. And Jesus is the completer of our faith. Why look at the circumstances? We need to be looking to the One who will complete our faith. Only then will we find the strength to get through the trial.

When Jesus spoke to Peter, prior to Peter's denial of the Lord, He told Him: "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail."

Do we understand that trials come so that our faith will be strengthened, so that our faith will not fail? Even the devil must get permission from God before he can begin to sift us. If God allows it, it is for our good.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego looked to God. He was all that they saw. They didn't see the fire. They didn't think about the results. They knew that God was able. They just didn't know His perfect will for them, but it didn't matter. They trusted Him implicitly. **They knew that whatever God chose to do, it would be the right thing.** Wow!

Faith is always a step into the unknown. But what Shadrach and his friends

knew, and what we must know, too, is that the unknown is not unknown to God. When we take that step into the unknown, we will find that the Lord is already there, waiting for us.

IMMEASURABLY MORE

Eph. 3:20-Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ...

God's ways are higher than our ways; His thoughts higher than our thoughts. That which God has for us is far beyond our ability to think or imagine. And it was so with the three Hebrew men, as well. Not only did God rescue them, He sent His only Son, Jesus, to stand with them. How's that for a response to faith? It makes one think of Stephen, the first martyr. When he looked up, he saw Jesus standing in Heaven. We know that Jesus went to sit at the right hand of the Father, but when Stephen gave up his life, Jesus stood up. And He came down to visit these three wonderful men of God as they stood in the midst of a blazing fire. And when they walked out to greet the king, they were not even singed by the fire. God's ways are higher than our ways.

What He did for the three Hebrew men was far greater than what they had expected.

That is always the case with God.

It is possible that many of us never see these powerful higher ways of God because we refuse to take the same kind of stand that Stephen took, or that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego took. Without faith it is impossible to please God. God does not want us to go through our trials, barely escaping with our lives. He wants us to slam dunk them. He wants us to stride boldly through our trials, and to exit them victoriously.

God wants to see some Shadrach's, Meshach's, and Abednego's among us. All it takes is faith, friends. And Jesus is both the author and the completer of our faith.

There are too many John's and Tim's and Bob's in the world. We need more Shadrach's. Have you got a new son coming? Go ahead. I dare you!

There will be no Radical Discipleship meetings on alternate Monday nights any longer. Thanks for attending. God met us and taught us.

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