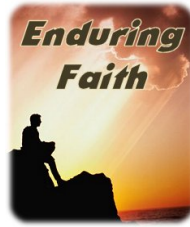


"Enduring Faith"

By Allan Pole



Theme: God is calling us to trust Him through thick and thin.

Text: Daniel 3

Here's a thought: John Wimber said, "Before you ask why some people aren't healed, pray over a thousand people."

Have you seen the power of God demonstrated when people have prayed? Have you ever been disappointed when you have prayed and have not seen results?

In 580 B.C. there lived four Jewish young men that had been taken as political captives by the king of Babylon from their homeland of Judah. These four soon proved themselves to be leaders of wisdom, character and integrity that loved God. One of them, Daniel, was elevated to the king's right hand and the other three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were promoted to become provincial administrators.

Their heart for the Lord and recognition by the king came with a price, however. Amongst their peers were jealous position-seekers that kept a watchful eye on these men and that schemed over how they could bring them down. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, ruled over the most powerful empire of the day with many national leaders and their people subject to him. He was spiritually confused as he tried to stir many gods into the melting pot.

Into this confusion there arose a 90-foot statue of gold that the king constructed and declared as the nation's object of worship. These four young Jewish men were immediately faced with a choice: worship the statue and violate God's command not to worship any idols or refuse to worship the statue and risk facing King Nebuchadnezzar's wrath. They chose not to worship the statue and through delighted informants they were brought to the king to face the ultimatum: worship the statue or die in a blazing hot furnace.

Daniel 3:16-18 reveals a confidence in God that would withstand the fiery furnace:

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 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. 18 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." NIV

I admire the response of these three and I see that their convictions have immediate application to God's people today!

Enduring faith declares:

I Believe God Works Miracles

I Follow God Even When He Doesn't Work Miracles

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There is no doubt in the minds of these three Jewish fellows that God is alive and well and able to do anything. Such faith provided the environment for a mighty miracle from heaven.

It is this kind of faith that enables one to see miracles such as in Luke 5:12-13:

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. NIV

This man that was cleansed of leprosy served as a catalyst for many others to see the power of God in action. Many who saw such miracles had little or no faith. Likewise the hearts of those who looked on as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace were far from God. The faith of these three men enabled these onlookers to see a miracle that day.

Seven-year-old Justin let out with a loud, shrill whistle during the minister's prayer one Sunday. After the church service his mother scolded him and asked, "Son, whatever made you do such a thing?"

"I asked God to teach me to whistle, and He did right then," answered the boy.

I believe that we are about to see God work more miracles than we have ever seen. I have seen the Lord perform a number of miracles over the years that I have walked with Him. I hope to see many more. I have to confess that I have, at times, been disappointed with God and I have tried to find answers to the prayers that seem to go unanswered. What should I do when this happens? It is at this point that my faith goes to a deeper level.

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Do you think the hearts of these three Jewish men – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – were racing as they responded to King Nebuchadnezzar's intimidating command to worship the image of gold? Of course they were! I am sure that they were afraid as they considered the power and majesty of the greatest king on earth. They were more concerned, however, about the power and majesty of the greatest king in all *heaven* and earth. What would God Almighty think if they buckled under the pressure and worshiped anyone or anything other than the One that truly deserved it?

These men demonstrated an enduring faith that continues to challenge the people of God 2,600 years later! Their refusal to bow to the golden image of the king was not based upon their own self-interests. The Lord certainly wants to bless His people, but how many are being promised lives of comfort and pleasure if they would only turn to Him? These three Hebrew leaders trusted God to look after them and to honour their obedience to Him, but they were willing to pay the ultimate price for their Lord.

I grow tired of hearing people's "moral dilemmas". They are dilemmas because so many people have lost sight of values and morals that are based upon the standards of the eternal and unchanging God. Our ethics have become utilitarian, as we wrestle with the mere consequences of our choices rather than consider the One who judges the righteousness of our choices.

A lot of our “moral dilemmas” are answered once we decide whom we will serve. Will we focus on ourselves, the approval of others or on bringing pleasure to the One that determines our eternal destiny?

Yes, the Lord performs miracles. There are other times when the Lord does not perform miracles. I don’t understand why any more than the Apostle Paul understood why.

Listen to the dialogue between the Apostle Paul and the Lord in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. NIV

King Nebuchadnezzar thought he could force people to bow in worship to him and to what he had made. He used death threats to coerce loyalty and admiration. The God who made you and me never uses such tactics. He employs neither threats nor impressive miracles to impose relationship upon any of us. Jesus had lots of opportunities to demonstrate His power in front of religious and political leaders but He refused. He refused because the hearts and minds of these leaders were not predisposed toward faith in Him. He knew that miracles alone would not win the world over to God. He reserved His miracles for those who had even the slightest measure of belief.

The pastor missed his plane, stood there looking at his watch, then angrily drove back to town with it and stopped at the jewellery store operated by his parishioner. "I had faith in this watch," he told the jeweller, "but it has failed me."

The jeweller inspected the watch, then said, "Well, pastor, you should know that `faith without works is dead.'"

Curiously, there are many others that love Him but remain in the circumstances they have been in. I don’t have any easy answers for this.

Consider Joni Erickson Tada. She is a woman that has remained true to the Lord despite her unanswered pleas for healing. Looking back on her struggles she can now see how God has used her confinement to a wheelchair for His glory.

The influence of the late John Wimber lingers. He used to say, "Before you ask why some people aren't healed, pray over a thousand people."

In order to emphasize the heat of the furnace Daniel makes a point of mentioning that even the soldiers dragging Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were burned to death. Such mighty warriors were selected from the army on account of their size and strength. They and their king represent the epitome of human achievement that cannot compare to the awesome power of God.

Changes in our circumstances need not upset us if we live close to the Lord and rest in His grace and care. Note that while the Garden of Eden was no paradise to Adam without God, the fiery furnace was no terror to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with God!

Once these three men were thrown into the blazing furnace, stunned onlookers – including the king himself – watched as not three but four men walked around in the flames. King Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognized the fourth as a supernatural being and he called them out. The fourth figure disappeared from their sight and the three young men emerged with no trace of the fire on them.

No one could deny that a miracle had taken place right before his eyes. King Nebuchadnezzar's declaration of judgment became a declaration that the God of these three was true and mighty.

For some reason God intervened in this situation. Before and since this mighty miracle there have been thousands of godly people that have suffered and died for their faith. Why? You and I may never know but the most important question is, "Will we be true to Him regardless of the end result?"

As John Fletcher stepped behind his pulpit one Sunday, the message he had prepared was suddenly swept from his thoughts like leaves before a gust of wind. He tried to recall the text, the sermon, some illustration, but the mental blackout remained. All at once a picture of the three brave Hebrews who were cast into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace came to his mind. As the Holy Spirit aided him, he therefore began to preach extemporaneously (spontaneously) on this story. The congregation sat spellbound. Seldom had he spoken with such grace and power. Unknown to Fletcher, a woman in the audience was risking her life merely by coming to that service. Her husband, who was a baker, had sworn that he would kill her by putting her into his large oven if she ever went to a church meeting again. But she felt that she must obey God rather than man. So in spite of his threats, she came to worship. The pastor's improvised sermon therefore became the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to remind her that God is able to deliver His own even from a "burning fiery furnace." When she arrived home, her angry husband was standing in the doorway brandishing

his big bread knife. With a prayer on her lips she walked up to him with the confidence that God was on her side.

Suddenly he began to shake under deep conviction. Falling to his knees, he wept and pleaded, "Pray for me. Please pray for me! I'm a terribly wicked man!" Her godly courage resulted in her husband's conversion.

Our Lord is calling us to a commitment to Him that transcends the fair-weather faith that is too often lived out.

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