

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Rise Above the Heat

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Daniel 3

How many of you like watching Wimbledon? How many of you watched the women's final yesterday? Pretty good, huh? Simona Halep came out of nowhere, definitely an underdog, had only one grand slam on her resume, which is not bad. But she was playing Serena Williams who was going for her 24th Grand Slam title. Well, Halep beat Serena in 56 minutes. Six-two, six-two, straight sets. For those of you who are not tennis players, that's really good. In fact, when Serena was being interviewed after the match, she said, "You know what? Sometimes players come out here and they are so good, you just have to tip your hat." Well, it's true. Wow. Simona was the first Romanian to win Wimbledon.

I love underdog stories, don't you? People who overcome the odds and win. Do you know what's better than one underdog? Three of them, especially Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Can you say that? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now how many of you have heard that story in scripture? If you've never heard this story, you're about to be blessed. And if you have heard it, I believe you're going to be blessed, too, because I believe you're going to hear a message from this story that maybe you haven't heard before.

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is going to bring you great inspiration and give you the strength to take your step of faith. Let me say that again. Today, you are going to receive the strength to take your step of faith. I don't know what your step of faith is today. Maybe for some of you it's finally deciding to become a Christian, to surrender your life to Jesus Christ. You've been to church. You've heard interesting things about the faith, but you've never made that decision and you're ready to take that step of faith.

Maybe for some of you, your step of faith is becoming more active in the church, to get stronger in your faith take a ministry to the next level. Maybe for others it's a dream you've always had in your heart and you know God has put it there, but you've never been able to take that step of faith. Of course, for others of

you, your step of faith today may be finally calling that therapist or doctor about that problem you have in your life.

For others of you, maybe it's some challenge or opportunity you have right in front of you and you're afraid. But you know deep down you need to take that step of faith. Or maybe for some of you, your step of faith is finally standing up for a particular issue or for a particular person in your life.

One thing I've learned, folks, is that we all have steps of faith God calls us to take. Now all these steps are different because we all come from different walks of life and different journeys of faith. But one of the things that we all have in common is that if we are on the journey of faith, God will call us to take steps of faith. We can't grow without it. We can't be the people that God wants us to be without taking steps of faith.

This is where many of us get stuck, right? We're afraid about risks and so we make excuses. Well, I'm not old enough. Well, I don't have enough resources. Well, well, it's not the right time. Well, it just doesn't feel right and on and on we go. If there's one thing human beings are good at, it's about making excuses. But I'll tell you this. If you're looking to search scripture today to find some excuse as to not taking your step of faith, you're never going to find it. Because one thing we see in scripture over and over and over again are people, the most unlikely people, the most vulnerable people, the weakest people becoming heroes for God. And yeah, they had their excuses, but God would not listen. But because they took a step of faith, they became heroes.

So my question for you today is what is your step of faith? I believe many of you know what it is. You've prayed about it. You know you need to take it.

You know it's the right thing to do. You know it's eminent, but maybe you're terrified because of the risk. Well, I believe the message I have for you today is going to give you strength you need to get through your fear and take that step of faith that just may change your

life. So let's jump right into it, the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Daniel, Chapter 3, because this is where the story begins and like all good stories, the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego begins with a very good villain, King Nebuchadnezzar. Now King Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king who ruled Babylon in 586 AD. He took the Jews captive and forced many of them to Babylon to serve him.

Nebuchadnezzar worshiped many gods like many of the kings did back then. In fact, one of the main gods he worshiped, believe it or not, was a big golden cube. Nebuchadnezzar believed that as long as everyone bowed down to this golden cube, everything would be great in the kingdom and he would succeed. In fact, this is what scripture says. "Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and people of every language, this is what you are commanded to do. As soon as you hear the sound of the horn and the flute and the zither ... " I don't know what a zither is. It's probably worse than an accordion. I don't know. " ... a lyre a harp, a pipe, and all kinds of music. When you hear it, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship it will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

Now today, in our modern culture, we may think it's silly that King Nebuchadnezzar thought it was okay to worship this golden cube. We may think it's silly that he believed that as long as he worshiped this golden cube, he would be successful. But you know what? Not much has changed. We still worship gods in our culture. We just call them different things: money, sex, power, sports, fame. We love that golden statue of Oscar. In fact, today, there are many people who aren't in worship. Instead, they're on soccer fields, baseball fields, instead of worshipping the Lord our God.

Now, you know I'm not a stuffy preacher. I enjoy life. I think God wants us to enjoy life. But the point is this, no god of our culture, no god, that this culture worships, will ever be able to fulfill that void that only God can fill. But some people learn this the hard way, don't they? We know. Toys break, boats, they rust and they sink. People will disappoint and betray. And if you haven't figured that out, let me tell you, you will. Beauty and power fades. Money, it comes and goes and we can't take it with us. I mean, think about it. Have you

ever seen a hearse hauling a U-Haul? Have you ever seen that? And then gravity comes. I'm not going to say more than that. And yet many still believe that the gods of our culture will satisfy, will somehow fulfill. Nebuchadnezzar, he believed it. And he also believed that unless everyone else believed it, if they didn't admit to believing it, well then, they would be burned to death.

This is why King Nebi got angry when tattletales showed up at his house. And this is where the story continued. No one likes a tattletale, right? But in this story, they were astrologers. Astrologers think they know everything, don't they? And they showed up at King Nebi's house with bad news and they knocked on King Nebi's mansion. A servant answered the door and they said, "Listen, we've got to tell King Nebi some bad news." And they walked in and the servant led them to King Nebi and he was on his living room couch watching the game, eating popcorn. And he said, "Who is this?" "Sir, they're here to talk to you about something." "What?" "Well, sir, we've got some bad news for you." "Oh my gosh," he paused the television. And he said, "What?" Said, "You know those three guys you put in leadership positions? You know, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Well, they're not worshipping that God at all. In fact, they refused to do it and we felt we needed to tell you." He said, "What?" And King Nebi, he got up from his couch, he wiped the popcorn off his chest and he said, "Bring them here to me."

Well, those astrologers, they went out, they found Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They cuffed them. They put them in the squad car. They brought them back to King Nebi and this is what happened. 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, the flute, the zither, the lyre, the harp, the pipe, and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you don't worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Nebi was going to get to the truth. "Listen, I hear rumors all the time and I don't know if it's true or not, but right now we're gonna get to the bottom of it. So when the music plays, go ahead and bow down. And if you bow down, everything's wonderful. But if you don't, well you see that bonfire in my backyard? I'm going to cook you to a medium-rare. We're going to have a barbecue."

Can you imagine being in the shoes of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego at that moment? I mean, what would you do? They had a key moment of decision. They could step back and bow down and say to themselves, "Well, we don't really believe this, but we don't want to get fried." Or they could finally take a step of faith. They were Jewish. They loved God, the one and only true God. They had been faithful. But at that very moment, their faith was being tested unlike it ever had been before.

Maybe you're there right now with whatever step of faith you have in your life. You're on the precipice of it, but there is so much risk. There is so much terror. There is so much fear. You don't know if you can do it, but you know deep within you need to do it. Once again, maybe you're someone who knows it's time to surrender your life to Jesus Christ, to follow our Lord and Savior. But you're saying, "You know what? I still have some questions that I need answered and I'm not going to do it until all my questions are answered." Well, good luck with that. If we could know everything there was to know about God, God would not be big enough to believe in, amen? Or maybe you're a Christian, but you're looking for a church. You're church shopping, and you're looking to become more active in a church and grow in the church and develop in the church. But you're looking for the perfect church. Good luck with that one, too. It doesn't exist. And if you're here in worship today and you're a visitor, we're a wonderful church, but we ain't perfect, far from it. And some of you have heard me say this before, if you're looking for the perfect church and you join it, well it won't be perfect anymore. Right?

Maybe you're ready to start a ministry or follow some dream that you've always had in your heart but you've always made excuses at every turn, at every opportunity. Well, it's not the right time. I don't have enough resources. It doesn't feel right. Does it ever feel right? Or maybe you have an addiction and you need to call that doctor or therapist, but you don't know if you can live without it. Are you really going to let it cost you your marriage, your family, or maybe your life?

Or maybe that step of faith you want to take is standing up for that person at work, or calling out that injustice, but you're terrified. Well, let me ask you this. Will you really be able to sleep at night if you don't? I know it may be difficult. I'm not saying it's not, whatever step of faith is in front of you, but I have just

the right thing for you today that I think is going to push you and encourage you and empower you to take it.

The story continues as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Nebuchadnezzar respond to King Nebi's threat:

"King Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown to the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and He will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if He does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of the gold you have set up."

I love their response because it's all about action, not words. They were saying, "We're not going to debate chapter and verse with you. We're not going to debate theology with you. We're not going to debate religion with you. I'll tell you what, just go ahead and throw us in there. Just go ahead and do it and see what happens. You go ahead and do it. Our Lord will deliver us and even if He doesn't, not even death will separate us from Him."

This made Nebi angrier and angrier to the point where he didn't just want to cook Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego medium-rare. He wanted them well-done. Listen to this. "Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up them. So these men wearing their robes and their trousers and their turbans and other clothes were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace."

So that's what they decided to do. Faced with what seemed like excruciating pain and death, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego decided to take a step of faith. And you want to know what happened? This is what scripture says. "Then King Nebuchadnezzar, he leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He said, "Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound, unharmed and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

So when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego decided to take that step of faith, something extraordinary happened. An angel of the Lord appeared and King Nebi ordered them to be brought up from the furnace and he looked them over, looking for a scratch, looking for a bleed, looking for something and he found nothing. They weren't even sunburned. And at that very moment, King Nebuchadnezzar became a believer and he would say this. "Praise be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego Who has sent His angel and rescued His servants. They trusted in Him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

And right then and there, King Nebi gave them a promotion in the province of Babylon. Not only did they survive, they got a raise. They went from the flames to fame.

And what does all of this mean for you today, as you face your step of faith, as you face the precipice of this decision you have to make, as you face your terror, this is what it means and listen closely: When you take your step of faith, the Lord will appear to you. Let me say that again. When you take your step of faith, whatever it is, the Lord will appear to you.

Now, did you notice from the story that the Lord did not appear to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out

of the furnace. The Lord only appeared to them in the fiery furnace once they were willing to take that step, the Lord appeared. And that's important for us to hear because so often when we have this step of faith that we know we need to take, we say to God, "God, if you show me a sign, then I'll do it. God, if you just give me the strength right now, then I'll do it. Lord, if You show me some direction, then I'll do it."

But it doesn't always work that way because we have to give up control. We have to finally surrender to the Lord. "Lord, I'm going to do this and I'm going to count on You to be there." Because here's the truth. As Augustine said, "Without God, we cannot but without us, God will not."

So let me ask you again. Are you willing to take your step of faith, whatever it is? You know inside it needs to be done. You've prayed about it, you've thought about it, you've reflected on it. You know integrity says yes. Everything points to it, but just your fear is standing in the way and maybe you're waiting on God. Well, the truth may be that God is be waiting on you. When you take your step of faith, the Lord will appear, and this I know, for the Bible tells me so.