

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

COURAGE IN SPITE OF THE HEAT

by Patrick Morrison

Living a godly life in an ungodly world is necessary and lofty in principle, but often difficult to implement in practice. It is usually not the case that we don't know what is right, but rather we struggle with putting into practice what we know to be right. The willingness (or unwillingness, as it may be) to live a godly life in the midst of a terribly wicked world comes down to a matter of conviction. Paul would write, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

In a world steeped in the darkness of sin, and enshrouded in the blackness of wickedness, those who are lost need us to shine forth the glorious light of Christ. Satan will see to it that we face the fire in order to test the depth of our convictions. We will have our mettle tested by persecution, ridicule, threat of harm, loss of relationships, negative peer pressure, and myriads of other ways by which the Devil will attempt to persuade us to compromise or abandon our faith. Those who are trying to live for the Lord will face trials of faith (2 Timothy 3:12).

If you have not experienced fiery trials, one of two things holds true: 1) tests are coming, or 2) you have not shown a depth of conviction which would convince the Devil and those through whom he works that you need your faith tested. Most don't desire struggles or pain. It seems natural to wish to avoid such. Yet, the Christian understands that the trials of his/her faith will build character, and teach a greater reliance upon, and faith in, God (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:7).

Christian, you will have your feet held to the fire! How will you respond in those times of great tribulation? Will the fire prove too painful, or will you come through these tests with deeper conviction? Will you give up, or will you stand in?

Likely one of your favorite stories from the Bible that you remember from the time of your youth is the account of the three Hebrew youths Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3). Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (later given the Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were taken captive to Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar (606 B.C.). With the threat of being burned alive in a fiery furnace looming over them, these three young men refused to give in to the king's command to bow down and worship a ninety-foot tall image of his likeness.

With the fierceness of his anger kindled, Nebuchadnezzar commanded the furnace to be heated to seven times its original temperature so that these rebels might suffer for their stubbornness. The response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the midst of such a trial provides us with a great lesson about taking courage in spite of the heat. Here were three young men who stood firm upon their convictions, and would not be persuaded otherwise! What can we learn from them about conviction, compromise, courage, and character?

CONVICTION BREEDS COURAGE

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been raised up with the word of God. The very names their parents gave them

were to serve as a reminder of their belief and trust in the God of heaven. Hananiah's name meant "Jehovah has favored." Mishael's name meant "who is what God is?" Azariah's name meant "Jehovah has helped."

From the earliest of remembrances, these young men had been taught about their covenant relationship with Jehovah, and were reminded of this day after day. When these young men, along with Daniel, were forcibly removed from their homes and taken away captive into Babylon, their faith was immediately put to the test.

The three joined Daniel in the refusal to partake of the king's meat and the king's wine which was being fed to the noble sons of the Hebrew captives (Daniel 1:8, 17), even though such a stand could have cost them their lives. The depth of their convictions caused them to stand up for what they knew to be right, in spite of the circumstances or consequences. Friends, this is the true definition of courage!

Many are under the impression that a person is courageous who is willing to take risks. Don't confuse stupidity or thrill-seeking with bravery and courage. Real courage is born out of true conviction.

Upon hearing the command of Nebuchadnezzar, that at the sound of the instruments of music the entire nation was to bow down to the golden likeness of the king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego already knew that they would refuse to honor such a request. It wasn't that their courage suddenly caused them to stand up for their convictions; it was that they were so convicted of the truth about the one

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true and living God that they were willing to suffer whatever may come as a result of standing foursquare upon it! Just how convicted were these three young men? When asked of Nebuchadnezzar, "and who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15), these three remarkable youths spoke with unmistakable conviction: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:17-18).

These were not the words of rebellious, defiant youth. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted fully in God's power to deliver them, but, even if God chose not to do so, they would gladly die in order to remain true to their God! May we be reminded that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Are we so convicted of the truths of God's word that, when our feet are held to the fire, our faith will stand the test?

CONVICTION BUCKS COMPROMISE

How easy do you suppose it would have been for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to have given in to Nebuchadnezzar and bowed down to worship his image? After all, they were young, they were far away from home, far away from the eyes of those who knew them and who would disapprove of their actions.

Who would expect young men who had been torn away from their homes and thrust into the midst of such a wicked, idolatrous people to stand up and stand out for what was right? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not concerned with what others

expected of them; they were only concerned with what God expected of them.

They could be taken from the city of God, and they could have their names changed in order to remove the thought of God from them, but these three Hebrew youths would not allow their convictions to be taken from them, or compromised in any way! When our faith is put to the test, the Devil will make sure that opportunities to compromise our convictions will be placed conveniently before us.

Will we attend all assemblies of the church faithfully when on vacation, even when those we know are nowhere around?

Will we be tempted to compromise our modesty and dress like the world when among the worldly?

Will we find it convenient to tell dirty jokes and curse when we are around those who do such at work? Remember, it is far easier to give in than to stand in!

Compromise is a sign of cowardice, and cowardice in regard to standing for the truth will cost us our souls (Revelation 21:8)! When we are truly convicted concerning God's word, we will be the same no matter where we are, and no matter who we are with.

CONVICTION BUILDS CHARACTER

While Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can certainly teach us many lessons about courageous, faithful living in the face of great trial, they also likely learned a few things about themselves through the course of the events recorded in the book of Daniel. How could three young men stand so firmly against the threats of the mightiest king on earth? What caused them to exhibit such courage, and to refuse to compromise?

I submit unto you that experience had taught them that God will always reward faithfulness. Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego willing to face the fiery furnace?

God had already brought them through one test, as recorded in Daniel chapter one. Why could they make the request to eat only vegetables and drink only water while their brothers in the flesh were feasting on the king's meat and wine? God had seen them through the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and their subsequent march to Babylon. Every time these young men were willing to stand for what was right, God had blessed them, cared for them, provided for them, and had been with them through every trial.

With each test of their faith successfully passed, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could take comfort in knowing that the next trial could be overcome just as had those before it. Paul by inspiration tells us that the trying of our faith works experience (Romans 5:4, KJV), or builds character (ESV).

As the fire of trial grew hotter, the character of the three young men grew stronger and more refined. It is often said that trials prove what kind of people we really are. They will show our faith for what it really is: conviction, or convenience.

Will your faith stand the test of fiery trial, or will your soul wither in the heat? Until you are fully convicted of God's word, then courage will fail you in the heat of the moment, and compromise and convenience will reign supreme. Study the word of God (2 Peter 3:18). Meditate upon it constantly (Psalm 119:97). Lay it up in your heart (Psalm 119:11). Then, when Satan begins hurling his fiery darts, you can stand firmly upon your convictions, building character with each test of faith that you pass. Take courage in spite of the fire!



18th Annual Power Lectures

July 25-29, 2010

Moses: The meekest man In All The Land

Sunday

- 9:30 A.M. *Eldad & Medad: The Spirit That Dwelleth In Us Lusteth To Envy*
Robert Jefferies
- 10:30 A.M. *Moses: A Great Prophet Who Personified A Greater*
Keith Mosher, Sr.
When Society Wages War On Boys –
Brad Harrub
- 6:00 P.M. *The Legacy Of Amram & Jochebed: How To Raise Your Son To Be A Leader Among God's People*
Glenn Colley

Monday

- 9:00 A.M. *Weak Leaders: What Did This People Unto Thee?*
Dave Leonard
- 10:00 A.M. *Moses: Who Built According To The Pattern*
Curtis Cates
- 11:00 A.M. *And He Began To Make Excuse – Who Am I?*
Gary Hampton
- 1:00 P.M. *Korah, Dathan, & Abiram: Swallowing Up The Competition*
Todd Clippard
- 2:00 P.M. *Passing The Mantle: Making Sure The Work Doesn't Die With You*
Bob Prichard
- 2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) *Helping Your Husband To Be A Leader Of God's People*
Cindy Colley
- 7:00 P.M. *Loving The People You Lead*
Allen Webster
- 8:00 P.M. *When The People Murnur*
B.J. Clarke

Tuesday

- 9:00 A.M. *When A Meek Man Gets Mad*
Patrick Morrison
- 10:00 A.M. *Learned In All The Wisdom Of The Egyptians: Keeping Your Faith While Receiving A Secular Education*
Dan Cates
- 11:00 A.M. *Keeping The Flock: What God Taught Moses On The Backside Of The Desert*
Melvin Sapp
- 1:00 P.M. *When Success Depends Upon You And Your Hands Are Heavy*
Chuck Webster
- 2:00 P.M. *Moses And The Magicians*
Lee Davis
- 2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) *Moving From The Shadows To The Son & From The Imperfect To The Perfect*
Teresa Hampton
- 7:00 P.M. *Refusing To Compromise: There Shall Not An Hoof Be Left Behind –*
Greg Dismuke
- 8:00 P.M. *By Faith Moses: The Highlights Of A Great Career (Heb. 11) –*
Eric Owens

Wednesday

- 9:00 A.M. *Nephews & New Fire*
Caleb Campbell
- 10:00 A.M. *Here Am I: Answering The Call To Lead God's People*
Bobby Liddell
- 11:00 A.M. *And He Began To Make Excuse – But, Behold, They Will Not Believe Me*
Kevin Beard
- 1:00 P.M. *Face To Face, Friend To Friend*
Mike Vestal
- 2:00 P.M. *But We Are Moses' Disciples: The Foolishness Of Following Moses & His Law After The Coming Of Christ & His Law*
Tim Burroughs
- 2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) *Teaching Your Children To Love One Another*
Melony Webster
- 7:00 P.M. *When A Nation Throws Away Its Future: Unwanted Babies And A Nation's Demise*
Eric Lyons
- 8:00 P.M. *Handling The Hard Causes*
Tommy J. Hicks

Thursday

- 9:00 A.M. *Then Sang Moses*
Tom Wacaster
- 10:00 A.M. *Standing On Holy Ground*
Bobby O'dell
- 11:00 A.M. *And He Began To Make Excuse – O My Lord, I Am Not Eloquent*
Jason Hilburn
- 1:00 P.M. *May It Be Said Of Me: The Servant Of The Lord*
Dwayne Butler
- 2:00 P.M. *May It Be Said Of Me: The Man Of God*
Chris Butler
- 2:00 P.M. (Ladies Class) *Redeeming The Time Because The Days Are Evil*
April Meacham
- 7:00 P.M. *What Moses Saw From Mount Nebo*
Tom Holland
- 8:00 P.M. *My Servant Moses Is Not So, Who Is Faithful In All Mine House*
Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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THANK GOD FOR THE PATRIARCHS

by Patrick Morrison

You probably already have in mind that I am writing about those early Bible characters such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No, those are not the individuals to whom I am making reference.

This past Lord's Day my family had opportunity to visit a congregation of which we were once members. While most of the membership has changed, we found several familiar families still faithfully involved in the work. In particular was an older Christian man and elder that we had grown to love very dearly. On the day of our visit, he had a role in the public worship. As I listened to him read and explain from the scriptures, I also did a little reminiscing about our time under his leadership.

I recalled his enthusiasm as the worship assembly attendance grew closer and closer to two hundred. I recalled some very difficult and tumultuous times with which he had to deal as a shepherd of God's people. I recalled the tragic death of His wonderful wife as she lost her earthly fight with cancer (She won the eternal victory). I also reflected on my personal knowledge that even at that present time he was struggling with health problems of his own. He had been there, faithfully, through thick and thin. To me he seemed like one of the patriarchs of old.

The dictionary says a patriarch is "the oldest member of a group." It adds that a patriarch is "a venerable old man." We certainly want to keep our admiration and respect for mere men and women within the confines of Biblical limitation (Romans 12:3); however, in any given congregation, there are likely men, or women for that matter, who would fall into this category. They are like the patriarchs. They are some of the oldest among us; they have seen growth due to faithfulness. They have seen small worship crowds because of a lack of love for the Lord. They have rejoiced over the good that has happened in the congregation. They have weathered the storms that always seem to come. They struggle with the health problems that come with age. Yet, in spite of it all, they are still in their seats when the saints assemble. They have continued to trust God and have not given up on His promises.

I know that many of them feel as though their age and health keep them from being instrumental to the work of the local congregation. I reject that notion completely.

These honorable Christians continue to exert a priceless influence on those of us who are eager to receive it. They teach us about the priorities in life. They teach us the necessary love of assembling with the Saints to worship God and encourage one another. They teach us that time is filled with swift transition but that the Gospel Truths that they learned and know are still good for families today. They are a testament to the hope of longevity for local congregations in communities large and small. Where would we be without them? Thankfully, we have our own local cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1).

We ought to thank God for these honorable ones among us. We ought to listen to what their lives can teach us. Maybe one day, we can honor them by being such a Godly influence on the generation that follows us.

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