

## **"SHADRACH & COMPANY"**

### ***Daniel, Chapter 3***

Our sermon this morning is not really a sermon at all--it is simply an introduction to an Old Testament story. It is a shame--really--to have to introduce it , for the story speaks well for itself. But these old tales, sadly enough, are not as familiar as they used to be--so some comment may be needed.

Let us pray:

**"O Lord, open Thou our minds and hearts--  
to a twice told tale that it may speak a true and lively  
word to us. Amen**

Long ago, when I was growing up in Georgia, I had a little Jewish friend, whose father, a prosperous merchant, delighted in telling his children Old Testament stories. One evening, when all the neighborhood children were gathered about him on the porch, called the piazza, urging him to "tell us a tale"; his little boy, my friend, said, "father, tell us the one about Shadrach and Company." Whereupon we heard all about this Old Testament business--how Shadrach, and the two partners in his firm, Meshach and Abednego, because they had prospered exceedingly in a foreign country, were accused by the envious of disloyalty, that they were traitors, so the wicked dictator of that land demanded that they give up their religion, or he would put Shadrach and Company in a great oven to cremate them, but though they were afraid, they were loyal to their faith, did not beg and plead for their lives, or grovel before that dictator, just told him their God could deliver them if He willed, but even if He did not save them from the fire, they would trust Him still, so they entered the oven flames, and (said the father) a strange thing happened. The fire had no power to destroy faith and courage like that, for, in spite of all appearances to the contrary in this old world of ours, God is walking at the side of goodness, and it shall not be consumed. Believe that--and you shall be no man's slave.

A few years later, my Jewish friend and I were to remember with special poignancy his father's telling of the Old Testament story of "Shadrach and Company", for by this time it was the Second World War, and the ovens were aflame again. Thousands of Jews were facing the crematoria of yet another dictator, and thousands of his kin and mine, the flaming death of total war.



Once again, faith and courage were being tried in “the burning, fiery furnace.”

You see, the ancient story of “Shadrach and Company” is truly a timeless one. It was told originally, as were all the stories in the book of Daniel, to encourage second century B. C. Jews under persecution in Jerusalem, who were suffering terrors under a wicked Syrian dictator. The world has never lacked for tyrants. This one’s name was Antiochus Epiphanes. He despised the Jew’s religion. He shrieked with mocking laughter as he plundered their sacred temple, set up a naked sculpture of a pagan god in their Holy of Holies, giggled, as swine’s blood ran on the altar, forbade their rites, kicked and burned their scriptures.

So the stories of Daniel were told originally to remind these Jews how their fathers had been persecuted centuries before, in a foreign land, in Babylon, under other dictators, and how, even in that “burning, fiery furnace”, God had not overlooked their faith and their courage. Far from it: for as the Jewish father was trying to tell us on the piazza that day, no matter how hot the fire of persecution, no matter how intense the flames of man’s cruelty to man, no matter how terrible the pain--God always walks beside faith and courage, and they shall not be bound, nor consumed. Righteousness is its own vindication.

You know what? Those second century B. C. Jews believed that to be true. They believed these stories in the Book of Daniel about their seventh century B. C. fathers. They said, “If in the past, God never deserted His saints, if in pain and peril he has always been with his people, he is with us too. We must not despair before the dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes, any more than Shadrach and his company despaired before the dictator, Nebuchadnezzar. We too must have faith and courage.” And they did. And they overthrew the tyrant; cleansed the temple, rededicated it and set out anew.

And here is the old story that inspired them to do it--the story that down through the centuries has given courage to many a Jew--and might even be of some help to us too.

--Reading from the Book of Daniel, the King James or Authorized Version--the third chapter--beginning at the first verse:

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Let us pray: O Lord Christ, when confronted by the blazing evil of our own day, may we not attempt to argue or compromise with it, though it be entrenched in the power of kings,



**governments, etc, gathered together--but may we force it straight--with that absolute faith in Thee, oh God, which alone makes for unswerving loyalty and courage even under the fire of pagan threats or golden pagan laughter. Help us to believe that one like unto the Son of God still walks at the side of goodness--and it shall not be consumed.**