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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 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, 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 the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, O king.” He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to 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.

WE WILL NOT SERVE OTHER GODS!

- I. This confession draws the line.
- II. This confession rests on God.
- III. This confession is pleasing to God.

Dear fellow beneficiaries of the Reformation,

You are the beneficiaries of the gift of the open Bible for all the people of God. You are heirs of the truth that the Bible has two basic teachers – the law and the Gospel. The law tells us that we are guilty of sin and the Gospel that tells us that God has forgiven us for Jesus sake. You are the beneficiaries of the truth that all believers are declared royal priests, a holy people, to show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of the darkness of unbelief into His marvelous light. You are beneficiaries of the truth that God has declared you righteous in His sight on the basis of your faith in Jesus Christ. You know that under the law of God, you stand condemned to death and hell. But you also know that God has had a plan for you from eternity. You were chosen to be joined to Christ by faith in Him and declared a child of God and an heir of salvation. From the Bible He inspired to be written, the Holy Spirit has convinced you that God has graciously saved you so that you can confess today that you are saved by grace alone, revealed to you through the Scripture alone and made our own personal possession by faith alone in what the Scriptures teach.

God used some watershed events to bring these truths to light in what is now called the Lutheran Reformation. The Reformation started with ringing of a hammer as a notice was posted on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. In posting his 95 theses the Rev. Professor Martin Luther was attempting to correct and redirect the Church of Rome back to a solid stand on the Scriptures. What happened instead was a series of events which led to his excommunication and the imperial summon to appear before the Emperor Charles V at the city of Worms. This meeting at Worms concluded in his being declared a heretic and consequently put under the ban of death as an outlaw. Through it all God provided a silent protector for Luther in the person of Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony.

Where did this gifted teacher of the Bible stand in his in his personal faith and in his public ministry in as a teacher and pastor? His position is clearly stated at the Diet of Worms, the Imperial City, when in response to the demand to retract what he had written and what he was teaching, Dr. Luther replied, “*Until I am clearly shown from the Scriptures where I am wrong, guided by my conscience; Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. I cannot and I will not recant. God help me.*” He remained steadfast in this position throughout his life and when asked on his death bed whether he was willing to die holding to his conviction, he replied unequivocally, yes! Then he passed from life to eternal life.

I. This confession draws the line.

In our text for this morning we are told of three men who were challenged for their refusal to worship the golden image of their king. They took a stand on God's Word. They were willing to put their lives on the line in obedience to the First Commandment – **YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS**. Moses was also inspired to write, **YOU SHALL NOT BOW DOWN TO GRAVEN IMAGES**. There was not a word in those biblical statements which those three men did not understand. It was clear to them that they were not to commit the sin of idolatry. They were not to serve other gods.

This is the primary principle of conduct for a life of faith in God. *We will not serve other gods*. This confession draws the line separating between spiritual darkness (unbelief) and spiritual light (faith in Jesus Christ). This confession rests on God alone and this confession is pleasing to God.

Let's see how this played out in the lives of the Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. If you don't recognize these names, it is because these men are probably better known to you as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

You heard the account read from the lectern a few minutes ago. When called to account for not bowing down to the statue of the king, they could simply have said, *"No, we did not and we will not bow down to your image."* In a matter of minutes they would have been hauled off to the furnace. Instead they began, **O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter**. First of all, they did not deny that they had disobeyed the command of the king. More important, their answer was formulated with carefully chosen words. The result was that they were able to give a magnificent testimony to their God.

Remember Nebuchadnezzar had asked them, **What god will be able to rescue you?** that is, if he would indeed throw them into the furnace? The answer the three men gave was, **The God we serve is able to save us from it**. We need to see the tension which this answer posed. The men had drawn the line. There were two opposing forces at work here. The one is the king of Babylon who was the most powerful man in the world of that day and he presumed to play God. The other force at work is that of the Lord Jehovah. He is God, the creator of all things and He rules over all things.

The king had tried to burden the conscience of these men by forcing them into idolatrous worship. Their position was that by ordering them to do something that God has forbidden, the king had forfeited his right to their obedience. Since the king left them no alternative, they determined to obey God rather than man, even if it meant a martyr's death by fire. The king had a right to know their attitude toward him and now he knew. The king also needed to know what the proper attitude toward God is, and now he found out. The line is clearly drawn.

This line was drawn for you when the Spirit of God brought you to faith in Jesus Christ. From that moment on your life took a definite and different course from what it was before. As a citizen of the eternal kingdom your allegiance is now grounded in the commitment to serve your Living Savior. You have been given the armor of God to face off against any of the demons of hell or any agent the devil chooses to use in opposition to the Lord Christ.

It is not always easy to stand with the faithful and confess Jesus in the face of opposition. Peer pressure can be overwhelming at times. Threat of loss can cause us to consider withdrawing from a conflict rather than engaging in it. The devil is a formidable enemy who crafts his temptations to deny our God incrementally with subtle camouflage to hide his soul destroying purpose. Will you always make a clear confession that you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, as revealed in the Scripture alone? I pray you will!

II. This confession rests on God.

A person remains steadfast in his convictions by resting steadfastly on God. Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego didn't lean on themselves. They relied on the Lord Jehovah. They were committed to serve Him only. Listen, **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.**" This kind of commitment to serve the Lord God and Him only did not find its origin from within them. It came to them the same way it comes to us. Through His Word, God comes to you and does for you what He has promised to do: strengthen your faith. He does this especially through promises and declarations pertaining to the person and work of His Son, Jesus. He declares that your sins are covered and paid for. Through His Word God declares you righteous as He is righteous. Through His Word God preserves you in this saving faith. Through His Word God makes you bold to confess Him in the face of opposition.

This kind of confession is pleasing to God and God blesses it. Listen!! **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 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, 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 the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there**

three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, O king." He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

III. This confession is pleasing to God.

It is obvious that God was pleased with the stand the three men took. As God had accompanied and supported them in their bold witness to the truth; so He also accompanied them in their judgment by fire. The furnace stoked up to higher degrees – seven times higher! Three of the strongest soldiers in the king's army threw the men into the fire but they were killed by the heat of the fire. Four men walked about in the fire. In the eyes of the king the fourth man appeared to be divine, **"like a son of the gods."**

What had the king accomplished by the exercise of his blind rage? For one he lost three of the best and strongest fighting men in his army. Secondly, he succeeded in making God's miracle of deliverance even more impressive. He was defeated in the proud boast that nobody not even God would be able to save these men from their fate.

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to 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.

They were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except the true God. Lord God, give us such confident faith and the boldness to stand with these three witnesses whenever we may be called to do so. We will have no other gods but one, the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will serve no other gods. Amen!