

## Those Who Fear Him

(October 25, 2023)

I was teaching on **Daniel 3** this past Sunday evening regarding Daniel's three young friends and their having to stand before King Nebuchadnezzar, accused of not bowing or worshiping the image he set up. I was amazed at their resoluteness in the face of imminent danger. That danger of course was the threat leveled by Nebuchadnezzar to throw all three of them into the fiery furnace as a form of execution for their unwillingness to follow his mandate. What gave the men that ability to seem unconcerned with Nebuchadnezzar's threats even though they clearly realized he would not hesitate to follow through with those threats?

Their demeanor in the face of a painful death stands out for me. They were seemingly unafraid. They not only did not cower in the face of their impending death, but they seemed to fully embrace it in their response to the king. They were completely given over to God and His will for them; whatever that meant. They seemed to understand that one way or another, they would be tossed into the fiery furnace and it was completely God's choice as to what He would do in response to that as we see in **Daniel 3:16-18**.

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

I consider their words and marvel. Would I, in that very same situation, do the same thing they did? Would I have that much confidence in God and His will? Would I seemingly not even consider my own life to save it, but instead, give myself over to the Father and the perfection of His will?

So I thought about those three young men, their demeanor and their response. I looked again at the confidence in which they spoke, not being rude or disrespectful, but clearly placing a far higher allegiance on being faithful to God than doing something that would save their physical lives, but potentially ruin their relationship with Jehovah. In our modern day, it's a bit mind-boggling to consider being faced with something like this and setting the danger aside to see the greater goal; that of loving God more than life itself. How exactly did they do that?

We can certainly assume that God gave them strength and courage to face what they would ultimately face with no foreknown awareness of how God would respond. Would they die? Would God save them without harm? They had no clue but they were mentally prepared for either, according to the text.

Then it began to dawn on me. There was something within them that created a strong foundation, which made their hearts and will immovable. Because of that foundation, they faced King Nebuchadnezzar and his challenge to them with aplomb. They had only one response and knew of only one direction they could go. The other option was not even considered. It told me that the men had a palpable fear of (offending) the Lord. **Psalms 147:10-11** speaks to this.

10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse;  
 He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.  
 11 The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him,  
 In those who hope in His mercy.

**Psalm 147** is beautifully written. It opens by expressing how good God is and how we should spend our time in abject praise of and to Him for all of His wonderful blessings. Many of these blessings we fail to see because we do not actively look for them. We need to be a people of praise, deeply considering exactly what God has done for us. Whether it is salvation itself, or the many blessings He pours on our lives throughout each day, He is worthy of our praise.

Unfortunately for many (myself included), we probably do not praise or consider Him enough. As for me, I do not wear myself out as it were, praising Him for what He provides for me on a daily basis. I need to be more aware and more involved in deliberate praise.

**Psalm 147:8** begins to break down actual things that we should praise Him for and take to heart. He provides rain so plants will grow. He uses that grown grass and other plants to feed the animals. All the animal has to do is look for it and eat it. God cares for His Creation and the weather points us to Him. The beasts of the field and the birds of the air are all fed by God's hand. How much more does He care about people, who have been created in His image?



But focus on **verses 10-11** that I've listed above. There's something in there that speaks (or *should*), to our hearts and minds. Notice the Psalmist lists several things that do not impress God. "*He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man...*"

I am blessed to live in the country. As I drive over the many dirt roads, I see cows, goats, chickens, sheep and horses throughout. Besides dogs, I love to watch horses. They are so majestic. As they jog or gallop, their muscles can be clearly seen and highlight the fact of the horse's strength. Yet, they can be such gentle creatures as well.

Yet for all their beauty and strength, God "does not delight" in that strength. The same is true of the legs of a man. A man who works out can build up his legs to be very strong. They can be used to run, climb and even lift weights with those legs, yet, the Psalmist tells us that God "takes no pleasure" in a man's legs, regardless of how strong that man's legs might become through exercise.

Why does God seem to dismiss these things? I believe it is because God *made* horses and man's legs for a specific purpose so why would He be impressed with His own creative work? Certainly, He would call His original creation "good," thereby putting His stamp of approval on it. However, to be *impressed* with what He created as though He somehow surprised Himself is not something God entertains. As long as what He created does what it was created *to do*, then God is able to say it is "good."

But in **verse 11**, the Psalmist tells us exactly what God *does* take pleasure in (emphasis mine).

11 The Lord takes pleasure in those who **fear Him**,  
In those who **hope in His mercy**.

Why does the Lord take pleasure in those who fear Him and in those who hope in His mercy? Simply because those who do this are doing so of their own *volition*. Since humanity fell in Adam and Eve, there's been a struggle between temptation and doing what God wants. We do not automatically revere, respect, fear, love and follow God, nor do we *accidentally* move toward God in greater fellowship and closeness.

People who actively *choose* to fear Him and hope in His mercy are the ones who please God and are rewarded with greater faith and knowledge of God. Now remember (based on my previous articles), when I say to "fear God," I mean to fear *offending* God. In other words, looking at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their inner desire to fear (offending) God was so strong, that they really didn't care what Nebuchadnezzar did to them. They would not budge. They would not cower or kowtow. They would not do or say anything that might save their own lives that would end up offending God deeply. Had they done that, they would have been telling Nebuchadnezzar that he was more important than the God they worshiped. It's not something they considered.

It was their fear of (offending) God that kept them from caving into Nebuchadnezzar's demands. Their fear of (offending) God overpowered any fear they might have had of dying a horribly painful death in a fiery furnace.

It is the simplest of concepts to understand, yet difficult to put into practice because it takes *time*, *consistency*, and *perseverance* to create that pattern within ourselves. We also need to pray that God will help us to grow in our fear of (offending) Him.

I personally do not like it when people define the phrase "fear of God" to mean "deep reverential respect, awe" or something similar. While it *is* that, for me, it detracts from the actual concept, reducing it to something rather simple and catchy. We can respect a person without liking them. But to fear (offending) God is said for a reason. It places God's authority and our love for Him above everything else. We either get on board with that or end up being wishy-washy in our faith.

When we sin, we "grieve" the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:30**), and we often sin because we do not view *not sinning* as a high priority where God is concerned. Sin saddens, grieves and even angers Him. While we all sin, God's graciousness and love for us is always on display. However, we do have an obligation to not knowingly do things that grieve Him. We grieve Him when we do, say or think things that offend Him. Our love for Him should be such that we want to avoid offending Him at all costs. Again, this takes time to develop like any other relationship.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego clearly feared offending the Lord. That fear was such that it made them think nothing of losing their own lives for the God they loved and worshiped.

The more we endeavor to serve God out of a fear of offending Him, the greater our fear of offending Him will become. The greater the fear of offending Him, the easier it becomes to make the right decisions that please and glorify Him.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did it right because their entire lives were dedicated to living in a way that prompted them to avoid offending God at all costs. That was paramount for them (and Daniel). This desire to not offend God grew within them a very healthy, active and palpable fear of offending God so that their decisions became almost automatic in doing what was right without hesitation. A healthy fear of offending God leads to a lifelong practice of living rightly and therefore, pleasing God in the here and now.

I believe this fear of offending God can exist within each of us but it depends upon how badly we want to cultivate that fear of offending God. It's a decision we will need to make sometimes many times throughout each day until it becomes habit.

It's more important than anything especially in these days with the way the world is going that our lives are anchored in God, His truth and His righteousness. The only way I think we can accomplish that in reality, where the rubber meets the road is through an increasing fear of offending Him.