



## Learn from Conquerors of the Past

*based on Daniel 3:16-28*

*<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>19</sup> 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 <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

*<sup>24</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>25</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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.*

*<sup>28</sup> 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.”*

In Jesus' name, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow heirs of the Lutheran Reformation,

Jesus did not give a very pleasant picture of the future for the members of his church: “The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17).

In powerful imagery Jesus gave the Apostle John in Revelation the same message that he gave to his disciples when they were sitting on the top of the Mount of Olives on Tuesday of Holy Week. Satan is going to target you for attack. If you haven't experienced it yet, the attack is coming soon.

We can be better prepared for those attacks if we study victors of the past. On this Reformation Sunday, let's prepare ourselves: **The Attack is Coming Soon: Learn from Past Conquerors.**

The first thing that is evident from our lesson about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (SMA in future references) is that no one is safe from attack.

We meet SMA in the first chapter of Daniel. They joined Daniel in standing up for their faith. They refused to eat unclean foods. Yet the Lord prospered them. We are told, "The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (their Hebrew names); so they entered the king's service."

We meet them again in Daniel 2. At that time Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was going to put to death all the wise men in Babylon because they could not tell him his dream and its meaning. So Daniel asked SMA to plead for mercy from the God of heaven. The Lord answered their prayer by giving Daniel the interpretation of the vision. As a result, at the end of Daniel 2 we are told, "Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court" (2:49).

These Jewish exiles had reached the top levels of the Babylonian civil service pay scale! But that exalted position did not make them immune from Satan's attacks. In fact, it made them a target.

At the beginning of Daniel 3 we read that King Nebuchadnezzar had a huge statue erected, 90 feet tall (the distance from home to first base for those of you watching the World Series). Everyone was to bow down to worship it. It would have been easy for SMA to go with the flow, to bow down, to protect their good name, and then later tell everyone, "We really didn't mean it." But they refused to compromise their faith.

In fact, their very success made them targets. It was the envious astrologers who brought their "crime" to Nebuchadnezzar's attention. But they were not only targets for these evil men. Certainly Satan understood the importance of making these leading men compromise their faith.

The same was true with Martin Luther. Sometimes we portray Martin Luther as an obscure monk, but in reality by the time of the Reformation, he had become a well-respected doctor of theology and popular teacher at the University of Wittenberg. The outline on the back of the worship folder lists the key dates in Luther's early life so that we can see that had had already been lecturing at Wittenberg for five years before he posted the 95 theses. His goal wasn't to insult the powers that be. As a doctor of theology, he had been charged with warning God's people of false teachings and practices. He saw that people were misled into thinking that by buying a sheet of paper, an indulgence, in which the pope forgave people time of suffering in purgatory, that people were thinking that they could buy their way into heaven.

On October 31, 1517, Luther posted the 95 theses or statements for debate on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg so that these issues could be addressed. The formal debate never occurred. Instead these statements were reprinted widely. Luther became a target. So much so that in early 1521 he was summoned by Charles V,

the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the most powerful man in Europe, to appear before the imperial diet or assembly of German states at Worms, Germany.

Like SMA, Luther understood that his life was on the line. Even though he was given a promise that he would be safe, one hundred years earlier John Hus had been given a similar promise and ended up being burned at the stake.

It was because the Lord brought Luther to such a prominence place in the church that Satan targeted him. If he could make Luther compromise, so many others would follow. The truth would remain hidden.

The bad news for us is that the Lord has also placed us into a position of prominence. You are in a position of prominence primarily because of whom you know: You know Jesus as your Savior. It is by God's grace that you are here, that you have heard again the message that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the entire world. In baptism the Creator of the entire world united himself to you a promise. You are my child. I will keep you safe in my hands. Satan hated that same relationship that Eve had with God and attacked her. He will certainly also attack you because you know the Lord.

And you are in a prominent place because of the people who know you.

And you are a role model for someone. Pastors and spiritual leaders – we have a target on our back because we have the privilege of being role models for God's people. Even sins that we commit that we are unaware of can turn a person away from Christ. How Satan wants to see us fall!

Last week we were reminded that fathers are role models. You have this exalted position. But that makes you a target too. If he can make you fall, then your children will be more likely to fall prey to Satan as well.

Finally, we are all role models – someone is always watching us. How we carry out our faith or fail to carry out our faith can have an impact not just on our lives but on the lives of many of those around us.

**No one is safe from Satan's attacks!**

The second thing that is evident in this account is that **“One Little Word Can Fell Him.”**

What was that one little word that Martin Luther was talking about in the mighty Reformation hymn that we just sang? In reality, Luther wasn't thinking of just one word, but of any word from Scripture. If God has said it, Satan cannot stand up against it. We saw that when Satan attacked Jesus in the wilderness, and Jesus used God's Word to defend himself and defeat Satan.

Our heroes in Daniel 3 did the same thing. They were facing a horrible death. But they responded, “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.”

How did SMA have that kind of confidence? It wasn't simply because some good things had happened to them in the past. Remember, overall God seemed unable at this time to rescue his people. Remember, they

were a 1000 miles from home in exile. What gave them confidence when nothing around them seemed to say that their God could save them?

The psalmist wrote, “Then I thought, ‘To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.’ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds” (Psalm 77:10-12).

This is what gives us confidence. It is written! As we learned in our GOD’S WAYS course, God rescued 2 million people out of Egypt – and who did he use, an 80 year old geezer and staff.

Yet SMA knew that it may not be the Lord’s will to save them. They had no specific fire insurance from the Lord. But they knew, “Precious in the eyes of the Lord are the death of his saints.” If it was the Lord’s will that they perish, then that too would be ok. They knew that they would rise victorious from the ashes on the last day. So in faith they responded, “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.”

It was the Word that gave Luther that same victory. Even though he was standing before the most powerful man in Europe at the Diet in Worms, he would not take back what he had taught. “I cannot, I will not recant. My conscience is bound by the Word of God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me.”

It is written. One little word from Scripture.

It is true, some of our fellow believers right now are facing attacks from Satan very similar to what SMA and Luther faced. *The Voice of the Martyrs* just featured an article about pastors and parishioners in Vietnam who are beaten up and imprisoned for their faith. In communist countries like China and North Korea, the Christian faith is attacked. In predominately Muslim countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iraq, Christians are risking their lives to make a clear confession of the faith to those who will listen and even to their persecutors. Pray that the Lord would give strength to stand fast on God’s unchanging Word.

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