

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *It is not this Day*

SERIES: *Practicing Virtue*

SCRIPTURES: *Daniel 3*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

DATE: *2024 - 1 - 28*

**Credit to Gary Thomas, John Ortberg,*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. It is so good to worship with you today, everybody here in the room and also to those of you tuning into the livestream.

If you have your Bible with you turn to the book of **Daniel 3**. We'll get there in just a few minutes.

One of my favorite movie scenes, of all time, comes from the **Lord of the Rings (PIC)** trilogy. If you're not familiar with this series it was written by J.R.R Tolkien. He was a good friend of C.S. Lewis and a believer in Jesus. Both Lewis and Tolkien in their creative fiction writings clearly write with Biblical themes in mind. Tolkien's Lord Of the Rings trilogy depicts the epic battle between good and evil. And there's a scene where all seems hopeless for armies of good. Evil appears as if it will most surely win. Its army seems much greater. And the King of the army for good, Aragorn, is giving his pre-battle inspirational speech and he says one of my favorite lines...take a moment and check out this clip...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjZY2EfR-f8>

It's one of my favorite lines...**"A day may come when the courage of men fails...but it is not this day!"** And that's what I want to talk a little bit about today.

Two weeks ago we started our first sermon series of the year, called **“Practicing Virtue.” (Series Graphic)**...exploring five virtues that we can practice that will help us to live like more like Jesus.

This morning we want to talk about practicing a virtue called

I. Courage.

I want to look at one my favorite courage stories in the Bible. One of those stories you probably studied back when you were in children’s Sunday school class. And it has one of the most courageous lines in all of Scripture. Very much like Aragorn’s line: A day may come when the courage of men fails...but it is not this day.”

Story about three young men.

A. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Their story is found in the book of Daniel 3.

Kind of set the scene for you. These three young men were **Jews**. But they lived at a time when the Jews were essentially living under the control of a foreign Empire. **Babylon and their King, Nebuchadnezzar**. But they were good, hard-working young men...with great promise, in fact Daniel 3:12 says..

Danial 3:12 - ¹² ...there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...

So, even though they are, Jews they had risen to positions of power and influence in Babylon.

But there was a problem. You see, as followers of Yahweh, the Hebrew God. They knew the command, part of the 10 commandments, that said...they may not worship

or bow to any god but Yahweh. King Nebuchadnezzar made a law, that at certain times, everyone in his kingdom must bow and worship **a golden statue** (PIC) he had created. It was in direct contradiction with Yahweh's command.

What do you do, when you live in a world, a culture that asks you to compromise your allegiance to God? What do you do when you live in a world, that might ask you to live in a way that contradicts your commitment to Jesus? The answer that Bible gives us is: **courage**.

To follow, to live the life that he created you to live, at time, will require great courage. **The willingness to face danger, risk, fear, hardship, criticism head on.** It's a willingness to do the right thing no matter what the consequences might be. Even when you don't know what the outcome might be.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give us a glimpse into the kind of courage necessary to walk with Jesus, no matter the cost.

Some of King Nebuchadnezzar's advisor's discover that these three young men, refuse to follow the edict about bowing in worship to the King's idol. And they tell Nebuchadnezzar...

... they pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

So, **Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?"**

So, let me give you another chance at this.

¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made,

very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “

“Oh King we do not want to upset you. We want to live easy lives. We want to live in safety. We will bow to whatever god’s allow us to keep these comfortable lives...God’s of prosperity and wealth. God’s of compromise.”

This has to be one of the most inspiring, courageous moments in all of Scripture.

King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

A day may come, when the courage of men fails, but it is not this day.

It’s just incredible. The ability to face danger head on. A willingness to do the right thing no matter what the consequences might be.

Think about it, if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew what the outcome was going to be, their actions would not have been nearly as courageous, right? If they knew God was going to save them. But they did not know the outcome. In fact, they probably knew that often God doesn’t work in miracles. And that the likely outcome of their decision would be death by fire.

They knew God could save them. But courage, is choosing to do the right thing even if God doesn’t save them. Courage is choosing to do the right thing, when you don’t know the outcome. When the road towards the right thing involves, pain, and discomfort, danger.

And folks, this is such an important lesson many in the Christian church today. Many Christians want a version of Christianity, walking with Jesus that is comfortable and convenient. We want a Christianity that allows us to maintain power and wealth. Many do not want to face the risk, the challenges, the lifestyle change that might be necessary in order to obediently live the life that Jesus calls us to.

See you don't follow Jesus because he'll work miracles to get you out of trouble. You don't follow Jesus because he'll fix all of your relationships or get you the job you really want. You don't follow Jesus because he'll make you healthy and wealthy. You don't follow Jesus because it will lead to power and prestige.

Think about it like this...

Where did Jesus ever say to his followers, "God has a wonderful plan for your life, and that involves a great house, an attractive spouse, a terrific job, a wonderful car, and an endless succession of easy days?" Where does Jesus say that?

Nope, Jesus message instead was, "If you want to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me." And for 2,000 years, people have been making that choice. They followed the same path he walked on, they followed him through servanthood, they followed through sacrificial generosity, they followed him to suffering, they followed him into fires and lions's dens and persecution, they followed him to death.

Do you understand that we are here in this room because throughout history hundreds of thousands of ordinary men and women, most of who are long since forgotten, said they were willing to courageously take up the cross...face the furnace? They said, " I'll suffer. I'll face danger head on. I'll die if necessary."

The frightened **Moses**, somehow through the power of God, confronts Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. “Let my people go.”

A single, widowed, foreign young woman, named **Ruth**...giving up her homeland and her personal security and well-being to care for her mother-in-law... “Where you go I will go. No matter the cost.”

A beauty queen named **Esther**, with wealth and beauty and power laying in front of her, saying to her uncle Mordecai, when the history of God’s people hung on her slender soul... “I will go to the king and if I perish, I perish.”

And that courageous character quality passed down through the history of God’s people.

It’s **Mother Theresa** giving her life to care for the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta.

It’s **Father Damien** moving to the Island of the lepers (moloki) to care for their needs. Knowing all too well he would likely contract the deadly disease. Which he did and God did not miraculously save him.

It’s **Corrie Ten Boom** forgiving the Nazi soldier who had killed her family.

It’s **Martin Luther King Jr.**, whose birthday we celebrated just a couple weeks ago, standing up against injustice and racial inequality.

Over and over again, the courage of God’s people to say...

17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us... 18 But even if he does not, we will not serve your gods...”

And...it’s Jesus in a garden, facing a battle of wills with his Father, knowing the painful and dangerous road that lies ahead if he faces the Roman Empire head on. It’s Jesus standing silent before his unjust accusers. It’s the Messiah, being beaten and mocked and carrying his own cross and feeling the pain of nails pushing through his wrists. It’s the giver of life, hanging on a Roman cross, willing to breathe his last.

“My God is able to save me, but even if he does not I will walk through the fire, I will face the cross head on.”

A day may come when the courage of men fails, but it is not this day.

We come from a long line of courageous men and women of faith.

Ok, that said, let’s just bring this a little closer to home.

Truth is, many of us are not asked to face the fiery furnace or the slums of Calcutta or the Roman cross. We can be inspired by those stories and we should not be ignorant of them...but courage comes to us in a very different life experience.

But I would still argue that on a daily basis every single one of us faced with decisions, circumstances, life experiences that ask us to practice this virtue. So, what does courage look like for us, in our daily lives?

B. Practicing Daily Courage.

Making decisions – especially decisions in life, lifestyle, that go against the grain of culture. It’s interesting I was reading recently about the power of peer pressure. A study related to football officials and how they are often swayed by their surroundings.

Michael Lopez, a researcher at Skidmore College in New York, did a study that found referees are much more likely to make calls that favor the team whose coaches and players are on the sideline closest to the potential penalty. They feel the pressure to make call that favors the people around them. We’ve talked in here before about the concept of **two-kingdom theology**. We live in a worldly Kingdom, the US. But our primary allegiance is to Jesus’ Kingdom. And sometimes the decisions we make, just like Shadrach, Meshack and Abednago, put us at odds with our surrounding culture.

It's choosing **to forgive** someone who has wronged you, when the world says hold a grudge, harbor bitterness, get revenge.

Choosing **to apologize** to someone. You've made a mistake, you've hurt someone...you've justified your actions...but deep down you know the relationship will only be healed when one of you has the courage to step forward and apologize.

Choosing **to be a servant**. When you're the person in authority but you choose to serve those around you. Our world, often says, if you have authority, if you have seniority...take advantage of that privilege. "I shouldn't have to do that. That's not my job." Choosing servanthood take courage.

Choosing "simplicity", in a world that encourages materialism and greed. This is not easy...choosing to have less when you could have more.

Courage in our world might be **a conversation**...You may or may not know this, but almost every week here at Five Forks, we have someone walk through our doors for the first time. I've often thought, wow, that takes a lot courage. To walk into a large group of people, not really know anyone and try to figure out how we do things. For those of you, who have done that. Wow, thanks for your courage. And for those of us who are part of Five Forks, we need to have our eyes open for those folks. We need to have the courage **to introduce ourselves to someone we don't know**.

I heard a neat story about this. There was a gentlemen who was a chauffeur at the airport, picking up someone he didn't know. A wealthy, important individual, we'll call him Mr. Smith. But instead of holding a sign, you know as those folks often do. He walked right up and shook Mr. Smith's hand and said, "Welcome, Mr. Smith." Mr. Smith was very impressed. What Mr. Smith didn't know, is that this chauffeur had done that to the previous 30 men who had walked off the plane. When they gave

him a confused look, he knew he had the wrong person and moved on to the next. But the courage to step out and do the right thing, face fear head on.

If Shadrach, Meshack and Abednago can face the furnace you can start a conversation.

And part of what grows courage in us...is practicing courage in all of these small ways. In all of those circumstances this week... may you be reminded, inspired...

¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us ...¹⁸ But even if he does not...

Even if the path is hard, difficult, painful...I will do the right thing.

“A day may come when the courage of men fails, but it is not this day.”

Today, Five Forks we will be the church that practices courage.

Ok, so why would you do this? Well, let me just mention, one of...

C. The Gift of Courage.

I actually heard someone talk about this. There was this psychological study done about what happens in our lives when we are willing to face our fears rather than run from our fear. The study is published in a book called: Self-Esteem: Paradoxes and Innovations in Clinical Theory and Practice.

We often think that “if I was stronger or wealthier or more gifted or more intelligent or more beautiful then I would have more self-confidence and courage.”

But what the study discovered is that none of those attributes are what really matters. People can have all of those things and still have a very low self-esteem. What they discovered was this single common thread, related to self-esteem. It all has

to do with, what in psychology, is called **“approach and avoidance”**. That when you are facing a difficult situation, when you avoid it, if you don’t look it square in the eye, if you wimp out, if you run away...even if things turn out well, you’re sense of well-being or esteem goes down.

But if you are willing to approach it, to face it head on, if you move towards it, if you act out of courage...even if the situation turns out badly, there’s this surge of life inside of you. “Our God is able to save us, but even if he does not we will not worship you.

John Ortberg says, **“I think that is deeply a part of the reality of the Kingdom of Jesus in our midst.”** In other words, you act out of courageous confidence, you are acting out a virtue of Jesus Kingdom, and when you do, it gives you life!

That’s the gift of courage...as you practice courageous acts, even in small ways...you make that hard decision, you have that conversation, you face that fear...greater courage starts to grow in you.

Ok, final thought related to practicing courage.

D. Where do you find that kind of courage?

To run towards the danger. The kind of courage that will face a fiery furnace. But also the kind of courage that will help you to do the right thing in your own life no matter the consequences. The kind of courage that will help you to face your own life’s circumstances with confidence.

Well let’s go back to our story for just a moment...pick up in verse 19 - "**Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed.**"

Literally that could be translated, "**and the expression of his face changed.**" It’s kind of like at the Kipe house when everyone is sitting around having a pleasant

evening and Jenny and say, "Ok, it's time to brush teeth and get ready for bed." All of a sudden the expressions around the house change!

In the face of their staggering courage to face death rather than disobey God, Nebuchadnezzar lost control. His attitude towards them changed, and he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. Seven was used in the ancient world meaning "a lot...to the max." Nebuchadnezzar is saying, "Crank the furnace as hot as you can make it."

Imagine these three young men, facing what looks to be their final moment. They've seen the end coming since they first heard about the command to bow down before a statue of gold.

They feel the heat, they see the men who carried them to the furnace collapse and die from the flames. Then they're in the fire, and they wait for the searing pain, for the numbness, for the smoke inhalation that will suffocate their lungs, but nothing happens. They don't feel any different, and it begins to dawn on them they're not even warm--no burns, no smoke, and their restraints have disappeared.

And we're told... **"King Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet in amazement."** One translation actually says, "King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in terror", indicates an element of fear. I love this, the man who thought he had all the power in the situation, the one who thought he was in control, the one with wealth, and strength and who thought he was divine...now all of a sudden finds himself...fearful. Why because, remember in the end none of those ultimately lead to true courage.

He 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 God.' "**

There is a fourth person in the fire. And he is unharmed and apparently is the one who delivered the other three. He convened a little meeting right there in the furnace. Who was this fourth man, who appeared from nowhere and cheated death and, "looks in appearance like a son of the gods"? The text doesn't say, but most scholars will tell you they think it must have been Jesus.

Folks that's answer. Where do you find courage? To run towards the danger. The kind of courage that will face a fiery furnace. The kind of courage that will help you to do the right thing in your own life no matter the consequences. The kind of courage that will help you to face your own life's circumstances with confidence.

The answer is with Jesus.

One author says it like this:

“Going into the furnace, which looked like the last thing they wanted to do, turned out to be the greatest event of their lives. Ironically, the furnace that looked like death turned out to be the safest place of all. Why? Because God was there. Sometimes, friends, God delivers people from the furnace, but sometimes God delivers in the furnace, and those are the greatest times in your life.

We study this because there's a great danger for followers of Jesus, living in this comfortable world. The danger is that the primary goal of my life becomes furnace-avoidance, that I pray, " God deliver me from pain, discomfort, suffering, inconvenience. Make my life smooth, make my life easy, and make life comfortable, make it pleasant. Remove obstacles from me." We avoid even low-level flames.”

Scripture never tells us that we can have courage, because we'll be strong enough or smart enough or wealthy enough or educated enough or beautiful enough or life will go well enough...Scripture always tells, to have courage because God is with us.

Psalm 23:4 - “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”

Isaiah 41:10 - So do not fear, for I am with you;

Deuteronomy 31:6 - “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear...for it is the LORD your God who goes with you.

Hebrews 13:6 - So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

To follow Jesus means to wake up each day, to become aware each and every moment of every day that His very real presence goes with us in our lives. And when we live in the reality of Jesus presence, it allows to walk through life with courage, facing fear, danger, uncertainty and discomfort head on. We too can say, **“A day may come when the courage of men fails, but it is not this day.”**

Of course, one of the most practical expressions of Jesus very real presence with us is called **communion**. Through communion we are reminded of the body and blood of Jesus courageously given on our behalf so that we might live a life daily in his presence.

So as we close our service today we want to participate in this tangible expression of God’s presence with us.

Communion 8am service (Old Ritual):

And so, if you would please stand and join me and servers if you would please come and take your places down front. Just a word of instruction...

When you receive the bread, you may hold it and we will all eat together when everyone has been served. When you receive the cup. You may drink it, place the empty container back in the tray and then serve the person next to you. If you prefer gluten free bread, please raise your hand and Dad or Bill will bring it to you.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread broke it and gave it to his disciples. He also took a cup and blessed it and gave it to his disciples and we will do the same. I will have a prayer of blessing over the elements.

Friends this bread which we break...(SERVE)

If you would stand and join me again and servers if you would come forward.

Friends this cup which we bless, is it not...(SERVE)

9:45am Service:

So at this time I'm going to invite the worship team to come forward and servers you can come and take your places down front as well. In just a moment we're going to read our corporate prayer together. When we are done reading, you can begin entering the two side center aisle's, walk down front...take bread and eat, juice and drink then make your way back to your seat.

If you prefer gluten free bread, just ask when you get down front. And just a reminder, you don't need to be in a hurry to eat your bread as you make your way to the juice.

Let's read this prayer together...

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen"