

But If Not

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

– Daniel 3:17-18 –

The Lord has so graciously interwoven lessons about our spiritual relationship to Him into every facet of our earthly existence. If we carefully cultivate our healthiest earthly relationships, we can reciprocally learn something of how our faith in Him can grow toward perfection as well.

It may be difficult to grasp, but even the highest of human relationships are self-centered at their onset. The baby learns his cry is an effective tool to engage the mother to satisfy his needs as well as his desires. The damsel learns that her carefully executed movements attract more attention from her heart-smitten suitor. That very same suitor's interest in that damsel at first is self-serving as he envisions how she can increase his happiness. We cannot escape the reality that even the most loving of relationships are born out of self-interest, and what the other party can *do* for us. And yet, with time and healthy cultivation, a noble conversion takes place and what was once a self-directed interest becomes a relationship characterized by selfless qualities – the babe grows into a child and learns to *trust* his mother, the damsel becomes a wife who *loves* and *respects* her husband, and the suitor transforms into a husband who *honors* and *cherishes* his wife. In their matured state, these relationships which were founded upon the *actions* of the individuals are actually grown and secured upon the *character* of the same.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prove the depth and veracity of their relationship with their God in three words – “But if not”. It was not a matter of *if* He could deliver them from their exigency – for He was doubtless “able” to *act*. Surely, they had confidence that no matter what happened, He would “deliver [them] out of thine hand, O king”. Nebuchadnezzar had challenged the God of the Israel, and they knew that this pompous potentate was not going to claim a victory in that war. God would be glorified. The question, friends, was how? Would God use the three Hebrews as vessels of honor, or sheep for the slaughter? Instead of assuming to know the mind of God as to His *action*, these three in that moment of decision centered their faith upon His *character*. Instead of trusting in what God could or would *do*, they trusted God *for who He is*. He alone is worthy to fall before in prostrate devotion. He alone is due to receive adoration and worship. He alone hath power to destroy soul and body. This Babylonian monarch had no business assuming those qualities. Indeed, God *could* deliver them – “but if not,” nothing had intrinsically changed about *Him*. He was still God, Nebuchadnezzar had slighted Him, and they were not going to partake in his sin! “But if not... we will not [bow]...”

One of the greatest challenges to our faith is ascertaining the will of God, particularly during crises points in our lives. When danger arises, we know what God *can* do, but not necessarily what He *will* do. But His faithful actions in His past dealings with us should give birth to an increasing confidence that this God whom we serve remains true and faithful. He will be glorified. He can do so by delivering us, indeed. But if not? Will we love Him less? Shall our faith prove more based upon His actions than His person? May we, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refuse the temptation to yield to the fires of the king of Babylon, trusting rather Him who alone was, and is, and is to come, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty!