

*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. (Daniel 3:16-28)*

### **What would Make a Modern Day Reformation?**

When Abraham Lincoln was a young man, he once lamented the fact that all the great deeds and exciting events in history took place during the Revolution and the men of his time would have no chance to make their mark in history. Of course, he couldn’t have been more wrong. But he didn’t know the Civil War was coming or what great deeds would have to be done. Do we have a similar view of the Lutheran Reformation? For people like me who grew up hearing about the dramatic events of the Reformation – Luther’s “Here I stand speech,” his 95 Theses and the way his preaching set a continent on fire for the gospel – does it seem like we’ll never see days like that again? Church history did not stop in the 1500’s. If Christ hasn’t come back, there is still work to do. It may not feel like our century could never be excited about the gospel again. But that does not mean that we can let our church slowly wither and die while we indulge in nostalgia about Luther and the great deeds of the past. We still have the same power Luther had. We have the power of the gospel, the very power of God. So let’s ask today what it would take to make our century a time when the gospel goes forth again. **What would make a modern day Reformation?**

#### **I.**

The word of God that we have before us this morning illustrates the answer to that question. **What would make a modern day Reformation? Christians standing up for the truth.** That’s what happened in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a great Babylonian king. He was the one who destroyed Jerusalem and deported the people of Israel to Babylon. Before that final destruction, he had deported a number of gifted men and drafted them into his civil service. Among those individuals were the three men mentioned in our text for today: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, or as we know them better, the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace. These three young Jewish men rose very high in the service of Nebuchadnezzar very quickly. But that put them in a tight spot. Nebuchadnezzar decided to build an idol. Then he summoned every high ranking official of his empire and he commanded that when the signal sounded, all of them had to worship that idol. Of

course, that presented a difficulty for these three Jewish young men. When the king gave the signal, they refused to worship his false god.

When Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man alive, personally demanded that they do it, these three young men said, **“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.”** Now, the king was enraged that these men dared to defy him. So he ordered that the fiery furnace be heated up seven times hotter than normal. He had the men bound and thrown in. The fire was so hot that the flames killed the soldiers before they could complete their mission and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego simply fell into the furnace.

The king’s reaction was inevitable – and not just because of his ego. Nebuchadnezzar reacted the way unbelievers always react when believers stand up for the truth. Unbelievers hate our faith. They hate the courage that believers show when they face overwhelming odds. You see that truth enacted over and over again in history. Martin Luther just wanted to proclaim the truth. He wanted to share the comfort he had found in Christ. He thought that once he pointed out what God’s Word said, Christian people would be grateful for the gospel. But all the forces of unbelief raged against him. Men who claimed to represent the Christian Church but who denied the work of Christ did everything in their power to silence him. They threatened his life. The only reason they didn’t kill him was that a faithful Christian prince protected him.

And we can expect that same inevitable reaction today, even here in America. So far, the forces of unbelief here haven’t been able to throw us into prison. So far, there aren’t any fiery furnaces out there waiting for us and there is no Diet of Worms where we will have to defy the government’s orders to stop preaching. But our society does pressure us to shut our mouths. It dismisses what the Bible actually teaches as fundamentalism. Hollywood and the internet and the music industry work day and night to discredit the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality and marriage and abortion and casual sex and a whole host of other more subtle things. In the end, they teach that all gods are the same god and if you’re a good person, you will go to heaven, no matter what religion you belong to or even if you have no religion at all. And if we say “no” to any of those things, the best we can expect is ridicule. And it’s only going to get worse.

So with all the consequences that go with standing on God’s Word, why would anybody do it? For the same reasons that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to defy the king. For the same reasons that Luther and his coworkers were willing to defy the pope and the emperor. Because God works in our hearts through the gospel and he gives us the power to stand. What keeps us from standing up for the truth? You know that God gave us this message. You know it’s our job to share it, even if our society doesn’t like to hear it. But those consequences make it hard. Who wants to be mocked and ridiculed? Who wants to lose friends and maybe even potential spouses because of their religious beliefs? Who wants to seem strange and out of touch? None of us want that. All of that and worse can come from openly insisting on what God says. Even our own family members can turn on us if they think we’re turning into “Bible bangers.”

But you know what? Our fear of the consequences is sin. God promises that he will not let anything come to us except what is good for us. That even means the hard and painful things that come. God promises that he will always protect us and he will always give us the strength we need to face those difficulties. When we fail to trust his promises, we sin. When we don’t believe the risk is worth it, when we let ourselves be intimidated into silence, when we hide our faith because we don’t want to deal with the abuse, we are denying our faith. Jesus says that he will deny those who deny him. Can any of us claim that we have never denied Christ with our words or actions? With our silence or inactions?

We all deserve God’s punishment in hell. But Jesus came to save us from that. He lived the one life of perfect testimony to God in all of history. Not Luther, not even Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were perfect in standing up for the truth. Only Jesus was. His perfect life counts for us. God gives it to us. And God gives us his death. Jesus suffered death and hell on the cross because that’s what our weakness deserves. Jesus paid for all the ways we denied Christ with our words and with our silence. Then he rose and declared that all that sin is gone forever. He rose and declared that in God’s eyes, we have never once denied him. He rose and promised that we will live with him forever, no matter what we face here. He promised that he will never leave us or forsake us, not even when it’s a struggle to be faithful to him, not even when all the powers of earth and hell stack up to keep us from speaking the truth. And he promises that he will work through that gospel

message to change our hearts. He will make us the witnesses he wants us to be. Why would anyone stand up to the abuse of this world and proclaim the truth? Because God has changed us and he still works in us.

## II.

And when he works in us, he works in the world around us. Every time we proclaim the gospel, the Holy Spirit works. That message is the only source of Reformation this world will ever know. So our course is clear. But there still remains the problem of the price we pay for faithfulness to God. And in an unbelieving society, the cost of following Jesus is a huge barrier to joining us. The image the Christian Church has in our society is ugly. Our society looks down on people like us. So what will it take to change that? **What will make a modern day Reformation? God rescuing us from evil.**

That's what he did for the three men in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement because he knew they had thrown three bound men into the furnace. But when he looked past the bodies of his soldiers lying in front of the opening, he could see four men walking around unharmed. One of them was an angel. He called for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out and when they did, their clothes didn't even smell like smoke. God still rescues his people. When Luther left the Diet of Worms, he was placed under the ban. That meant that anyone who met him could kill him. It was a crime to even sell food to him. For the rest of his life, he had to stay in the territory of Saxony, where his prince protected him. Sooner or later, the emperor should have gotten him. But he never did. God protected him. Now, you can't point to a miracle like the fiery furnace. There was no moment when an angel appeared and saved Luther from his enemies. But God worked through ordinary things, like a prince who believed and a constitution that limited the emperor's reach and he protected him.

When Nebuchadnezzar saw the miracle, he praised God for saving Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now, as far we know, he did not become a believer. But he could not deny God's work and he never again tried to stop these three men from practicing their faith. To this day, when people study not just the way that God preserved Luther's life, but the way that he took an unknown monk at the far edge of the western world and used his words to change that world, even unbelieving scholars marvel. Did you know that more books have been written about Luther than about any other person except Napoleon? It's just such a dramatic story.

And God will work for us, too. Now, there's no promise that God will do a miracle and save us from death. The three men in the fiery furnace knew that. They knew that God could save them, but that he might decide it was time for them to die and come home to heaven. Luther knew that God could do a miracle to save him or he could let him die at any moment. While God can always do a miracle for us, we might take our stand for the truth and die for it or suffer losses we could never make up. We might lose friends and family and business opportunities and who knows what else. But God promises that he will always care for us, even in those situations.

And he promises that he will work when we proclaim the truth. The power of God is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. What changed Nebuchadnezzar's attitude was the power of God saving his people. What changed the world in Luther's day was the simple message of Christ dying and rising to take our sins away. What will change hearts today is nothing more or less than that simple gospel message. If God is going to do another Reformation in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he won't do it with speaking in tongues or supposed miracles. He won't do it with university professors writing scholarly books to each other. He won't do it through people adopting spirituality instead of religion. God will work through the word and the sacraments. That means he will work through us as we share that word and live by that word day in and day out until he returns. He will bring the elect to faith. But even unbelievers will at times be amazed at what God will do.

The Lutheran Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was an amazing time. It changed the world. But it wasn't the only reformation. Because the church lives in a sinful world, it always needs reform. Every generation has to go back to the word. Every generation has to shake off the influence of the sin of that time and remember what God says. Every generation has to take its stand on the word of God when all the world is against it. God has given us work to do. We cannot know if the gospel is going to change the world like it did in Luther's day. But we don't need to know that. God promises that he will be with us and work through us when we share the gospel. Trust him and be a part of the amazing things he does in the life of each person who comes to faith. Trust him and take your stand on the truth. Amen.