**But If Not**

*Daniel 3:18*

**Introduction**

1. The Bible is filled with true stories of men and women of faith for us to emulate in our lives.
   1. Most of these incredible accounts are in contexts hard for us to imagine. (EX: Noah’s ark, Abraham offering Isaac, Joseph betrayed by brothers, Esther putting her life on the line to save her people, Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi after losing her husband – continued lineage of Christ, etc.)
   2. However, they’re preserved for us to learn from so we can nurture a faith built to accomplish similar feats for God.
2. An impressive trait of faith demonstrated in nearly all the Biblical accounts we’ve come to appreciate:
   1. The ability to balance the confidence we have that God can and will deliver us from trial with the understanding that He may decide not to.
   2. Also, the corresponding determination to obey His will regardless of the outcome.
3. Demonstrated with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego:
   1. King Nebuchadnezzar erected an image and decreed that all must fall and worship it at the sound of the music.
      1. Refusal would be punished by being cast into a fiery furnace.
   2. **Daniel 3:7** – all did just that.
   3. Some accused the Jews before the king – **Daniel 3:12** – singled out the 3 friends of Daniel.
   4. Nebuchadnezzar is enraged, grants the 3 another chance, but their steely resolve to do God’s will overcame the king’s attempt at intimidation – **Daniel 3:13-18**
4. Note especially – **Daniel 3:16-18** – they had faith that God would deliver them, but realized it was up to Him, and the choice may be not to, ***“BUT IF NOT”*** they would do what was right in God’s sight.
5. Do we have faith like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego?
6. Faith Understands the Necessity of Trials
7. The joy of hope is followed by necessary trials – **1 Peter 1:6-9**
   1. ***“if need be”*** – if necessary – idea here is that it is necessary.
      1. In contrast to joy – ***“though now”*** – even though you rejoice, you will of necessity be put through trial.
   2. **(v. 7)** – tests the genuineness of faith.
      1. **Refining process** – helps us gain perspective, and eliminate unnecessary weights, and damning sins.
      2. **Hebrews 12:11** – produces peaceable fruit of righteousness.
   3. **(vv. 7-8)** – it is this faith which brings glory to Jesus.
      1. Not faith that is given an easy path, but faith that is proven.
      2. **1 Peter 2:21** – following the example of the suffering Savior.
   4. **(v. 9)** – it is this faith which will be rewarded.
      1. **Acts 14:22** – MUST go through tribulation to reach heaven.
      2. **“It is sweet to know, as I onward go, the way of the cross leads home.”**
8. Faith tested produces necessary virtues to be mature – **James 1:2-4**
   1. For this reason, we count it joy – because we know what good can come of trials.
9. When faith is tested through trial, we can prove ourselves to God, and solidify our hope – **Romans 5:3-5**
10. NOTE: Not that each specific trial was necessary to happen to us, but trials in general will occur, and they are necessary to test our faith, and it is a necessity that we don’t give up but push through them.
    1. For this reason, we view such trials as opportunities to prove ourselves before God and grow from them.
    2. It is not that they aren’t bad, but we decide to let the bad lead to something good by faith in God.
11. Faith Knows God is in Control
12. ***“our God whom we serve is able to deliver us…and He will deliver us” (Daniel 3:17)***.
13. Threatened disciples in the early church found solace in the remembrance of God’s control – **Acts 4:23-31**
    1. Peter and John arrested for preaching Jesus, threatened, and released – told not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer.
    2. Prayed with other apostles after being released:
       1. **(v. 24)** – appealed to God as creator.
       2. **(vv. 25-26)** – appealed to prophecy – Psalm 2 prophesied about the rebellion against God and Christ, and the victory of God with Christ taking the throne anyway.
       3. **(vv. 27-28)** – appealed to the prophecy fulfilled.
          1. **(v. 28)** – do whatever You purposed to be done.
          2. ***“The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 5:21)***.
       4. **(vv. 29-30)** – request for aid in current situation based on the appeals.
          1. Like you were in control in creation, and in control when Christ was led to be crucified, take control of this situation to your glory.
       5. **(v. 31)** – the efficacy of the prayer – answered.
    3. God is the Almighty Creator and is always in complete control, even when things may seem out of control.
14. Realize God is in control to bring about His will.
    1. **Acts 4:31** – their prayer was answered, but the persecution was not taken away.
       1. Placed back in prison in chapter 5.
       2. Beaten – **Acts 5:40-42** – but continued to preach.
       3. James eventually killed – **Acts 12:1-2** – but the word of God still grew – **Acts 12:24**
    2. **A realization that God is in control does not mean we’re confident everything will work out how we want it to BUT TRUSTING IT WILL WORK OUT THE WAY GOD SEES FIT.**
15. Paul was personally given insight into this point – **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**
    1. **(v. 7)** – the thorn was from Satan but allowed and used by God.
       1. Lest I should be exalted – humility – something God would want.
       2. Messenger of Satan – always means evil **(cf. 1 Peter 5:8** – seeking to devour) – to buffet – ***“to harass me” (ESV), “to torment me” (NASB)***.
    2. **(v. 8)** – Paul prayed for its removal – believed God was in control and could do so.
    3. **(vv. 9-10)** – Jesus’ reply – expresses the reality of God’s control, but that such may manifest in a way we might not expect.
       1. The thorn wasn’t removed but used as something beneficial to Paul’s faith.
       2. Brought his reliance on Christ, not himself – “lest I be exalted.”
       3. In this God was glorified.
16. Faith Obeys No Matter What
17. ***“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” (Daniel 3:18).***
18. Jesus is the perfect example for us to follow in this life – **Hebrews 4:15; 12:1-2**
19. Jesus struck the balance of such faith perfectly when He came to do His Father’s will – **Matthew 26:38-39**
    1. **(v. 38)** – Jesus’ trouble was real.
       1. We can’t take away from His humanity any more than we can His deity.
       2. His mediatorship relies on both – ***“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:6).***
       3. Luke’s record of His agony – ***“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44)***.
    2. **(v. 39)** – His prayer implied acknowledgment of God’s power and control, but also a meekness on His part.
       1. **Hebrews 5:7-8** – vehemently cried to God who He knew ***“was able to save Him from death”***
          1. But was filled with “godly fear.”
          2. But “learned obedience.”
20. Abraham struck the same balance – **Hebrews 11:17-19**
    1. **(v. 19)** – he apparently concluded God would raise up Isaac.
       1. We know that wasn’t God’s plan.
       2. However, he didn’t, but knew God was in control either way.
       3. **Genesis 22:8** – told Isaac God would provide a lamb.
    2. ***“from which [death] he also received him in a figurative sense”*** – Abraham knew Isaac was “the one,” and knew God was in control, but intended to obey God regardless of the circumstances (provided lamb, raising from dead, etc.).
21. The faith that is proven genuine through trials **(cf. 1 Peter 1:7)** is the ***“but if not…”*** faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego – understanding why trials must exist, believing God is in control, and obeying no matter what happens.

**Conclusion**

1. God grants no passes in the race of faith. All who run must do so on the same path laden with adversity.
2. The only way to be successful in faith is to know trials serve a purpose, that God is in control to bring such to fruition, and regardless of what happens we’re resolved to do God’s will.
3. What trials are you going through? Do you trust God? Are you willing to show such by continuing to do as He says, no matter how difficult it may be at the time?