

HOSANNA **WONG | TRANSCRIPT**

I got a phone call informing me that the warehouse that stored all of my books burned to the ground, every page and every resource that we made in ashes. What do you do when you're unexpectedly walking through a fire? Now for us, this is a loss, but this is a material loss. I know for many church leaders, ministry leaders, we have been going through all kinds of fires and having losses that were far beyond material things. We feel like we're losing hope, we're losing big teams, big dreams, big plans, big strategies. Maybe we are also losing resources. Some of us feel like we're losing our minds. We are walking through all of our own kinds of fires, and in this season I had to really consider, man, what is the future of my ministry? What does the future look like when it feels like we're sort of starting from the ground up in many ways? God, how can I have faith through fire?

I was reminded of this story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3. King Nebuchadnezzar is a King over Babylon. He conquers Judah, and one of the things he does is he gets Judah's brightest and youngest men and brings them to Babylon and trains them, brainwashes them, into the ways of the Babylonians. In fact, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego weren't even their original names. They were Hedaniah, which means beloved by God, and Mishael, which means who is like God, and Azariah, which means God has helped. So, from the get go, they want to make sure that these boys forget who they are. They want to make sure these boys forget where they're from and forget who they serve.

King Nebuchadnezzar makes a 90 foot statue of gold and says everyone has to bow to it, otherwise you're thrown into a fiery furnace, a blazing furnace, super hot, super bad, but they didn't expect that maybe three teenage boys would have remembered who they were, would have remembered where they were from. These three boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they don't bow and they are thrown into the fiery furnace. They refuse to bow down to any God but the one true God. We read in Daniel 3 that the King gets close and looks into the fire, and as he gets as close as he can to see what's happening in the middle of the fire ... by the way, God doesn't save them before the fire. Some of us want God to save us before the fire, but here we see in the middle of the fire, the presence of God is with them. He looks inside, he sees four guys, not three, and he says, "Come out." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of the fire and they come out.

You want to know something that I think is so fascinating about this story? It's probably the first thing that I learned during this season for my ministry. When I'm thinking about the future for my ministry, I love this lesson. We can't fake it through the fire. We can't fake it through the fire. Some of us want to act like everything's all perfect in our ministries, in our churches, curating perfect stories and posting it on social media, but we don't want to fake it through the fire. The King got really close to see what was going on in the middle of the fire. I want you to know you don't have to fake it through the fire. One of the best things about Jesus is that he is Emmanuel, God with us, with us in the real fires, with us in the real trials, with us in the real storms. If we cover up the truth about the real things we're going through, we're going to cover up the truth about how Jesus is really present with us in it.

I love that in Daniel 3, it makes it clear that King Nebuchadnezzar got really close to see what was happening in the fire. I want you to know it's important that people see it. Leaders, it's important that people see it's important that the people that you lead see what it's like to be in the middle of the fire and standing up in the middle of it. It's important that your family members, that your staff see you standing with faith through fires. Even though you're fumbling through it, even though it's hard, even though it's not easy, it's important that we don't fake it through the fire. Then he goes on and says that when they got out of the fire, nothing on them was burned. Their clothes weren't burned. They didn't even have split ends like some of us do when we curl our hair, straighten our hair. It had no damage. It didn't need any Garnier Fructis anti-damage conditioner. They were all good.

Nothing on them was burned, but something was burned in the fire. When he threw them in, they were tied up and bound and chained, and the writer makes a note that when they came out, they were unbound and unharmed and nothing on them was burned. The only thing that was burned in the fire was the thing that bound them. The fire did not destroy the children of God. It destroyed what held them back, and leaders, I want to encourage you, the fire the enemy may have intended to harm you may be the exact same fire that God wants to use to set you free, free from worshiping your title, free from living for other people's opinions, free from the strategies you were planning that were not of God. I don't know what season you're in, but I know that the thing the enemy intended to harm us, God can use for His glory and our good. God loves using whatever we give Him. He doesn't waste anything. He likes to recycle things. He's very eco-friendly like that. Come on, Jesus. Whatever we give Him, He will use. We don't have to fake it through the fire. We can be freed in the middle of the fire.

So they come out, nothing on them is burned and they are unbound. They are free, but they were not the only ones set free, and this truth is what I am holding onto in the middle of the season as I look to the future. They were not the only ones set free. King Nebuchadnezzar goes on to say that now ... Remember before how everyone had to bow to this giant golden statue? That's no longer the case. He now says, "Man, look at this God. Look at their one true God. Now, everyone is free to worship this one true God." It's a good thing that these three teenage boys did not bow to the same thing that everyone else in the kingdom was bowing down to. It's a good thing that they did not bow down to the same fears that everyone was bowing down to, but instead gave an example that when people saw someone was standing in the middle of the fire and now they are showing how everyone else can stand now too. It's important that people see it and that they know that they too can have faith through fire. Don't fake it through the fire, be freed from the fire. I also want to tell you, do not fear the fire. Do not fear the fire of man.

I've lived a lot of my life in fear of fire. I've lived a lot of my life of fear of what if I make the wrong move? What if I don't hear God right? What if people don't like it? What if people haven't seen something like this? Because I have feared fire, I have feared disappointing people. I feared not doing things the perfect exact way. I have held back. Maybe I've never worshiped a statue before, but I have worshiped other people's opinions and I have held back my faith in fear of fire. Not being honest with the people around me, who my trust is in. I have held back my obedience in fear of fire, not writing what I feel God's called me to write, not saying what I feel God's called me to say, and not taking a step of faith where I feel God has called me to take a step of faith in. I have held back my story in fear of fire. For me, the first Chinese woman I ever saw preach was me, and I was very aware that I was the only one who looks like me on conference bills. I was very aware that my background was a little bit different, and because of that, I held back my story in fear of fire.

I grew up in the hood, like the hood hood, of San Francisco. The first time I saw someone murdered in front of me, I was nine. I thought that story was just too different for the church, and so I held back my story in fear of fire. My daddy was a recovered heroin addict, gangbanger, pimp, and thief, and I for sure wanted to hide that from my messages in fear of fire. I was not proud of being Chinese. I was afraid that people would make fun of my last name, Wong. I was afraid that being different would get in the way of my career. Since I was a spoken word artist, also, at the time, I chose to instead go by Hosanna Poetry instead of Hosanna Wong, in fear of fire. I held back details of my testimony, details of the sins Jesus set me free from, I held back the things that God wanted to use for His glory in fear of my own fire.

Maybe you have never bound down to a statue either, but maybe you too have felt called to tell a story, write a curriculum, or write a book, but you're not sure if everyone's going to like it or what people are going to say, what people's opinions will be, and you've held back your words in fear of fire. Maybe there's an injustice you want to speak up against or a group of people you want to stand up for, but no one else in your community is really doing that and so you're holding back your voice in fear of fire, or maybe you feel called to mentor younger people, or you feel called to reach out to a mentor and ask them to help you, but you're so scared of a no, or what it will look like to this person, if they'll think it's weird, and because of that, we just don't have cross-generational relationships and we're just not having much needed wisdom being passed down to younger generations because we are in fear of fire.

My challenge to church leaders today, when I am thinking of the future of my ministry, I've been convicted of how I've faked it through the fire. I've been convicted of how I haven't let fires free me, and I've been convicted of how I have lived afraid of the fire of man, but my challenge to leaders, as we look forward to the future, is don't live in fear of the fire of man. Instead, live fueled by the fire of God. We don't want to be a community of faith without any faith, holding back our engagement and silencing our songs, forfeiting in fear.

There is a world that is bowing to fears, a world that is bowing to lesser things, a world that is bowing to strategies and algorithms and branding. No, we want to be the example of people who can stand in the fire. When the world looks close and sees what Christ's followers were alike in the fire, may they see people standing in faith. You cannot afford to bow. This is what I have come to in this season, and what the future will look like for me in my ministry. I've asked all these two simple questions every day throughout this pandemic, these are the two things I've asked God. What do you want me to do? And what do you want me to say? What do you want me to do? And what do you want me to say? I don't want to live my life bowing. I want to show the world how they too can stand.

I want to leave you with this. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they had faith through fire, but we have something they don't. Days after Jesus went back to heaven, a new kind of fire came, the fire of the Holy Spirit, and that changes everything for all of us. It transforms and empowers Jesus' followers for forever. Acts 1:8 says that we will receive power. We will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we will be His witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, but for church leaders, for ministers, we are all about going to the ends of the earth. We're all in and that's good, but that's not the right order. We need to first be fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I hope the future of the church doesn't look like the best strategies, which are good. I hope the church leads in strategies. I hope the future of the church doesn't just look like the most creative things. Those creative things are good. I hope the church leads the way in creativity, but I hope that we are fueled by and propelled forward by the power of the Holy Spirit. Go into the world, but don't go without the fire. Don't go first without the fire of the Holy Spirit. Your ministry might not look like mine and his ministry may not look like hers and their ministry might not look like theirs. We all need to come to God and say, "What do you want me to do? And what do you want me to say?" That is what I want to encourage you within this season, and that's how I'm moving my ministry forward. I don't want to live in fear of the fire of man. The future of the church, I hope, is a church that is fueled by the fire of God. I love you all. I'm for you all, praying for you all. I hope to meet you all in person soon.