

Sunday Sermon January 29, 2017

Sermon Text: Daniel 3:13-27

Sermon Theme: What does Faith Look Like?

¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and 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? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes 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 the king, "O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ 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."

¹⁹ 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 ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ 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."

²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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, ²⁷ 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.

What does faith look like? When faith is taught in a confirmation class, the trust fall is often used. Most of us know what a trust fall is. One person is asked to fall backwards and the person behind them is supposed to catch them. The students usually show who they trust and who they don't trust by their willingness to fall.

If you have ever been part of a trust fall, you know the question is whether you should fall or not. Sometimes you might like the person and trust them in many other things, but maybe you don't trust them for this. You have doubts because trust falls don't always work the way they are supposed to, you doubt that the other person can support you or catch you, or maybe you have doubts because this might be the time that the other person will choose to be funny or mean and just step aside and let you fall to the floor.

In an effort to show what faith really is, the teacher has taught a lesson about the fears, worries and questions that stop us from trusting in someone and putting our faith in them.

It is very rare that we have complete faith and trust in anyone in this life. We trust our cars to get us to work, but after a certain year, we expect that they will break down. We trust the other drivers around us to stay in their lanes, until someone swerves in front of us, then we don't trust any other drivers. We trust our friends to be there for us, until they aren't. We trust our spouse to share important things with us and to be honest with us, until they aren't. It's hard to find what true trust looks like in this world because we don't often show true faith and trust in anything.

In our sermon text this morning we see what true faith and trust looks like. We see three men who were not just going to fall backwards onto the floor if their trust was broken, we see that they would die a horrible

death. This morning, as we look at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we will see a picture of what true faith in the Lord looks like.

Babylon had a unique way of conquering their enemies. Unlike, the other nations that would go into a country and destroy their cities and enslave their people, the Babylonians decided to use the resources of that country for their own benefit.

This showed itself in a number of different ways. They did not destroy the country completely, they would leave cities intact to allow resettled people to live there. They would not destroy the people of the nation or completely enslave them. They would leave a number of the original people there. These people could guide others sent to the country by Babylon, in the best ways to tend the land and produce crops and resources for the benefit of Babylon.

They also were not afraid of the strong, intelligent young men of the country. Instead, they would seek out the best and brightest of the peoples that they conquered and would train them in the ways of Babylon. Along the way, the best and brightest would have ideas that could be used for the good of Babylon. Some of these men would even rise to be leaders in the country.

This is what happened to 4 young Israelite men named Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These young men were captured and deported to Babylon by king Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar instructed his servants that young men should be chosen who were handsome, rugged, well-informed and quick to learn and understand and they should be trained for three years in order to see who was fit for to enter the king's service.

God had blessed Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego with all of these talents. These 4 men impressed the king with their knowledge and understanding. Because it was God that was blessing them, they even surpassed the knowledge and understanding of the king's own wise men and magicians.

God had blessed them with another, much more important trait: faith. Babylon was not Israel. Because it was a foreign country, there were customs and rituals that violated the Law of God. One of those was the food that was eaten. We are told in chapter 1 that these 4 men refused to eat the food that was prepared for them because it violated the Law of God. Instead of sinning against God, they put their faith into action asking the king to eat only the food which they prepared for themselves. God blessed this and they looked healthier and stronger than the other men who were eating the food prepared by the Babylonians.

Another was the temptation to go along with the worship of the gods of the country. It was common that the king of these foreign lands was revered and worshipped as a god by his people. In our text, we see this happening. There was a day set aside for Nebuchadnezzar to be worshipped by his people. When the music began, the people were to fall down and worship the 90 ft. golden likeness of Nebuchadnezzar. The punishment for not worshipping was to be thrown into the fiery furnace.

For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, there was only one God that that they would ever bow to and worship, that God was not Nebuchadnezzar.

They again put their faith in action for all to see by refusing to bow down and worship the statue. They were turned over to Nebuchadnezzar because of their disobedience. He was furious when he heard that these men, whom he had appointed managers over the whole province of Babylon, refused to give praise to him and worship to him. He called them in and gives them a second chance to obey him: **Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,¹⁴ and 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?¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes 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?"**

Did you hear it there? Nebuchadnezzar not only confronts them, he directly challenges their faith and trust in the Lord. Do you trust in your god, that he will deliver you from the fiery furnace....**what God will be able to rescue you from my hand?**

What would our reply be? How would we respond if in the same situation? Would we stand up for the Lord or would we give in? Most of us would like to think that we would stand firm in the Lord, but remember the trust fall, what kind of questions came into our heads when we were asked to trust in a small way? Imagine the questions that would come when we are asked to trust in a big way.

In our life we may never be put into a position where our life is at stake because of what we believe. But there are those who do have to choose their faith in God or their life here on earth. While our tests of faith may not be that great, we do have tests of our faith every day. How do we fare when we are asked to trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. Do we trust that God will provide us friends and acquaintances who will not speak against our beliefs, or do we choose not to speak about God because we doubt that that can happen? Do we trust that God will repair the feelings of a loved one who is angered when we point out sin in love? Do we trust that the Lord will make the dollars last or do we trust in ourselves to keep our money for ourselves? Do we trust in God when he has a different plan in mind for our life or do we trust in our own plan more?

More often than not, we find out that our sinful hearts and minds are not very good at trusting in the Lord. We do not have the faith that is ready and willing to trust in the Lord, instead we trust in ourselves more than God.

How did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond when their faith was tested and questioned? **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ 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.”**

Wow!!! Trust fall ... trusting that God will do what is best for them. They say, “We do not need to defend ourselves because God will. And what’s more, if he does not rescue us in an earthly way, in a way that seems miraculous to you, we will still not follow you and bow down.”

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered Nebuchadnezzar, they did not know what kind of deliverance the Lord would bring them. But they were ready. They were ready to be fully delivered, from the fire of the furnace, or from this life to heaven. They were ready to be caught by the Lord no matter where their trust fall would lead.

This is what trust and faith in the Lord looks like. These men trusted in the Lord to deliver them. Even if it meant their earthly deaths, that did not matter to them. They would continue to trust in the Lord.

In this situation, most people would say that it would be foolish to place this kind of trust in anything because this trust would mean certain death. Yet, in our second reading Paul told us what is foolish to the world is wisdom in God’s eyes.

Faith is often foolish to the world. To believe that we have a Savior who takes away our sins and delivers us in this world to the world to come is foolishness to many people. Instead of having faith in a Jesus to help us in this world many say that you must do whatever you can to avoid pain and suffering, you must do all you can to make this life good.

Faith in the Lord is never misplaced. We know what happens with these three men don’t we? They were thrown into the furnace which was so hot, it killed its attendants, but they were not harmed. The Lord spared them from any harm, there was no damage to any part of their body. The Lord caught them and delivered them.

The Lord can and does deliver us from many things. He does catch us no matter what. Our Lord is greater than any job we might lose, any financial difficulty we might have, any illness or disease we might be going through, or any problem we are experiencing. We trust in God not because of us, but because of him. He loves us and will never let us fall.

Clinging to the Lord for his goodness, trusting him to catch us no matter what, this is what faith and trust looks like.