

I.N.I.

14th Sunday after Pentecost

Daniel 3:1-30

August 29, 2010

In Christ Jesus, our Sure Defense, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In His sermon on the mount Jesus spent some time addressing the human emotion of worry. In closing His 10 verse discourse on the foolishness of worry, Jesus adds; **BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED TO YOU.** In other words, “Christian, put Me first, and I promise you, you will lack nothing you need for body and soul.”

That teaching is probably nowhere seen any clearer or in any more amazing way than in our text this morning. It's a favorite of most children, well known by most Christians, an encouragement and comfort for those experiencing spiritual tests in their lives and an instruction for believers of all ages. It is a beautiful story that teaches us the lesson and answers for us the question:

WHAT IS OUR GOAL IN LIFE?

We run into the 3 friends of Daniel----Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego early on in our study of the book of Daniel. As we heard in our first Scripture reading from Chapter 1 these Jewish youths were carried away into captivity by the Babylonians. But the Lord was with these faithful young men. The king recognized their wisdom and ability to lead and these men along with other foreigners who had been captured were sent to school to train to become leaders of the government. But from the very beginning Daniel and his 3 friends never compromised their faith and obedience to their LORD. We hear of them refusing to eat the luxurious meats that were sacrificed to the Babylonian gods and that were not prepared properly according to Old Testament regulations.

At the close of Chapter 1 we read that the King found no one equal to these 4 young men. In every matter of wisdom and understanding the King found them to be 10 times better than his own trained leaders. Later in Daniel we read of these 3 being appointed administrators over the province of Babylon itself. Humanly speaking Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had it made. Their political careers were certainly on the rise, they were well liked by the King, they were in the place of much honor and no doubt wealth and it looked like even bigger and better things were in store for them. They were up and rising stars.

But then came this spiritual trial in their lives. Were they living for this life, had they been corrupted by all of this power, riches and honor given to them? This trial laid before them the very real question

WHAT IS MY GOAL IN LIFE?

King Nebuchadnezzar had a very short memory. In Chapter 2 after Daniel had not only interpreted the king's dream but also was able to tell him what he had dreamed the King exclaimed **SURELY YOUR GOD IS THE GOD OF GODS AND THE LORD OF KINGS.** But now in Chapter 3 we see the King making a huge statue in honor to himself and the gods of Babylon and demanding that every official in his kingdom bow down and worship it.

Picture the drama as it unfolds. The king in his pompous pride builds a huge 90 foot tall statue and places it upon a large pedestal and calls all of his officials. A list of 8 different levels of government officials are gathered together for the dedication of this mammoth statue of gold. Row upon row of loyal officials stand at attention waiting for the King's orchestra to begin to play, to signal them to bow down and worship that image. The command was simple enough: **BOW DOWN AND WORSHIP**

THE IMAGE OF GOLD OR IMMEDIATELY BE THROWN INTO A BLAZING FURNACE!

Real voluntary worship there! No doubt the King did this to test the loyalty of his officers and to impress upon them that the Babylonian gods were far superior to the gods of the other nations.

Suddenly the music begins to play. Suppose you were one of these officials, you must make a decision, what would you do? Row upon row of officers hit the ground, bowed low and worshipped. Many Babylonian officials no doubt fell to the ground in worshipful devotion in the blindness of their spiritual ignorance; others no doubt fell to the ground only from an instinct of fear, survival and self-preservation. You do what you have to do to stay alive! And many today would agree. After all, isn't the most important thing in life--staying alive!

What would you do? Well, there out on that Plain of Dura stood 3 lonely figures who refused to bow down. Three who were convinced that there is a higher goal in life than just staying alive!

Now when everybody else is bowing low to the ground and you are the only ones standing up--you're not going to be hard to spot. And spotted they were. Immediately it was reported to the King that these 3 officials refused to do as the King had commanded. Nebuchadnezzar was furious with rage. Yet upon learning that it was these 3 honored men, he gives them a second chance. To Nebuchadnezzar his demand was not unreasonable--complete loyalty and devotion to me and the gods. But to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego it was terribly wrong. They knew the First Commandment **YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME**. No doubt they knew Deut. 6:13 **FEAR THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY!**

It would not be sinful for the 3 to pledge allegiance to the King as his subjects, even as we pledge allegiance to our government and give honor to the president; but to give the gods of Babylon the honor and worship and credit for making the country great (gods who don't even exist) that was wrong. We should not fear, love and trust in anyone or anything more than God, the one and only Triune God.

However Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were no different than us. They too had their sinful flesh which no doubt tempted them to do as the King demanded. The desire and the will to live, the instinct of self-preservation is very strong in everybody. They could easily have argued within themselves: "The king is not asking us to become heathens, or even join in worshipping at a heathen temple. All he asks for is a simple act of devotion requiring but a few moments of our time. We don't even have to believe in what we're doing, it's a forced worship, not from the heart; we simply have to go through the motions. After all God will understand, our work here has just begun. The Lord can do a whole lot more through us alive than dead. Why lose our lives needlessly?" A very tempting argument, isn't it?

They could have argued this way, but they didn't. They realized that the **GOAL** of their lives was not to stay alive and serve self, but to glorify God with their life. They realized that there was no way that they could bow down to this idol and still give glory to God. If they had obeyed the king they would have disgraced God. We fear God above all things when we respect and honor Him more than anyone or anything else and give Him all glory--when we are appalled and downright fearful to do anything that would disappoint, disgrace or dishonor Him.

How simple that then made their decision. And how much simpler our choices in life will be if when making the day-to-day decisions that life sets before us we would regularly ask: **CAN I DO THIS TO THE GLORY OF GOD? IF I DO THIS WOULD GOD LOOK UPON ME WITH LOVING JOY, OR DEEP SORROW.**

Christ's **GOAL** in life was to give Himself as a ransom for all. To serve, not to be served, to give not to get. To be sacrificed for us. With Christ as our motivation, having sacrificed Himself for us as full payment for our sins, we will be moved, compelled, constrained to want to live for Him.

What is our **GOAL** in life? All of the decisions in this life will reflect how we answer that question.

The King was embarrassed, ridiculed, defied and by foreigners in front of all of his administrators. There was no room for mercy. In rage he overreacted and heated the furnace 7 times hotter, bound the men hand and foot, still clothed in their finery (which would make them all the more flammable); and had them thrown into the furnace by the strongest of his soldiers. What did the King accomplish?

- 1) He lost his strongest soldiers who were killed by the leaping flames and heat of the furnace.
- 2) He made God's miraculous deliverance all the more impressive.

As the King with wounded pride, anger in his heart and stubborn satisfaction looked into the furnace he jumped up in astonishment. The 3 men were strolling about in the fire unharmed. The only things burned were the ropes that bound them, and there with them was an angel of God protecting them. Indeed the Psalmists words ring true: **BECAUSE YOU HAVE MADE THE LORD, WHO IS MY REFUGE EVEN THE MOST HIGH, YOUR HABITATION, NO EVIL SHALL BEFALL YOU, NOR SHALL ANY PLAGUE COME NEAR YOUR DWELLING; FOR HE SHALL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE OVER YOU, TO KEEP YOU IN ALL YOUR WAYS. THEY SHALL BEAR YOU UP IN THEIR HANDS, LEST YOU DASH YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.**

Nebuchadnezzar admits defeat and calls for the 3 men to come out of the fire. He calls their God the Most High, but yet in spiritual blindness does not believe Him to be the only God. The officials crowd around and see that not a hair was singed, no burned feet or hands, no clothing scorched, in fact not even the smell of smoke. It was as if it never happened to them.

Nebuchadnezzar had challenged God by saying **WHAT GOD WILL BE ABLE TO RESCUE YOU FROM MY HAND?** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego responded with that marvelous testimony, **O NEBUCHADNEZZAR, WE HAVE NO NEED TO ANSWER YOU IN THIS MATTER. IF THAT IS THE CASE, OUR GOD WHOM WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US FROM THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE, AND HE WILL DELIVER US FROM YOUR HAND, O KING. 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.**

With the flames no doubt in front of their eyes, their imminent death a few feet away these young men proclaimed **IF GOD WERE TO SEE FIT TO DELIVER US FROM THE FLAMES OF DEATH, FINE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE HIM; IF NOT THEN THAT IS HIS BUSINESS. OUR BUSINESS IS TO BE FAITHFUL AND LOYAL TO HIM ALONE.** Note that their faithfulness and loyalty to God did not depend on a happy outcome. In other words we are not to obey and be faithful to God only when it is convenient for us, or enjoyable or when the outcome is assured in our favor. Their object of affection was the LORD, not their King, not the kind treatment they would receive if they bowed down to his gods. What a tremendous example and testimony of a believer's submission to the will of His heavenly Father. Surrendering body and soul into His hands for safekeeping.

Does this story amaze us, surprise us and astonish us? In some ways it really shouldn't. For Satan has said to us **“what God will be able to rescue you, you miserable lost creatures. You can't live up to His perfect standards. He won't love you He will condemn you. You're not good enough, come enjoy life, go with the flow, bow down and devote your life to fun and pleasure and the excesses of all that makes life enjoyable.”** Or he tempts our sinful pride with these words **“you got to try harder to appease this angry God of yours. Only if you are good enough will you make it into heaven.** All of these temptations and more attack us. And how often we fail!

But by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word He has given us the strength to say no to them. To look only to the cross of Christ and the victorious power of His resurrection. Jesus has done it all for me. I have been set free from the power of sin and Satan through Christ. His righteousness is

my righteousness! This world's pleasure and charms have nothing that I would want more than eternal life with Jesus my Lord and Savior, my King!

That's **MY GOAL**; I pray it is yours to! Jesus in His discourse of Matthew 24 tells us that as the world draws to a close there will be religious confusion and deception, lovelessness will abound, and many will fall away. Jesus says expect persecution and tribulation. Paul repeats this thought in II Tim. 3:12 **YES, AND ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION.**

As possibly the last chapter of world history is being written, what a comforting truth the story of the fiery furnace is for the child of God. It assures us that no world power, no matter how hostile or powerful, can endanger the safety of God's people. Jesus has said to us, **DO NOT FEAR THOSE WHO KILL THE BODY BUT CANNOT KILL THE SOUL. BUT RATHER FEAR HIM WHO IS ABLE TO DESTROY BOTH SOUL AND BODY IN HELL.**

Fear, reverence, respect, obey and love God. For every time we are called upon to stand up for God's truth, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were, we can be confident that we stand under the constant protection of the One who has suffered and died for us and risen again to defeat all our enemies. He has promised **FEAR NOT, FOR I HAVE REDEEMED YOU; I HAVE CALLED YOU BY YOUR NAME; YOU ARE MINE. WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH WATERS, I WILL BE WITH YOU; AND THROUGH THE RIVERS, THEY SHALL NOT OVERFLOW YOU. WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH THE FIRE, YOU SHALL NOT BE BURNED, NOR SHALL THE FLAME SCORCH YOU. FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, YOUR SAVIOR.**

May everyone of us leave this morning fully aware and clearly knowing what our

REAL GOAL IN LIFE IS:
LIVE IN, LIVE FOR AND LIVE WITH CHRIST
now and forevermore!

Amen.