

Lord, Keep Us Faithful to Your Word!

How far are you willing to go to stand up for what you believe in? A lot of you right now are thinking about the upcoming election. Most of you probably have something to say, good or bad, about the candidates and the direction that our country should go. And so you stand up for what you believe in. You vote. There are some of you who had signs up in your yards for different candidates. Some of you have had countless hours of conversations with others, standing up for what you believe is the right way forward for our country. Some of you canvassed the area promoting a specific candidate. But when I ask the question, “How far are you willing to go to stand up for what you believe in?” I’m not talking about the election at all.

I’m talking about your faith in Jesus. I’m talking about worshiping and praying and owning and reading a bible regardless of what your rights and freedoms may be. I’m talking about your work in making sure that the truth of God’s Word doesn’t get watered down. I’m talking about making sure that every teaching of God’s Word is preached, not just the “important ones”. Throughout history Christians have risked their lives to preserve the truth of God’s Word, regardless of the governments that were in power. So, as the thoughts of our country are focused on this presidential battle that will be decided in the next few days, today, as we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, I want to remind all of you of the battle that Christians have been fighting for centuries: the battle to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word.

Our lesson for today is a very well-known section of the bible – Daniel in the lions’ den. There is so much that happened that led him to the point of being lowered down in that den of lions. Daniel was one of the most powerful politicians in the nation. There were a 120 satraps over the kingdom of Persia who were in charge of the land what is still considered one of the largest empires in history. Over those 120 satraps there were three administrators. Daniel was one of them. When people heard that the king had plans to promote Daniel to an even higher position, a plot began against him. Political mudslinging – we are familiar with this. They tried to find something in his past to ruin his good name. The problem was he was a decent, honest man, with a great work ethic. They couldn’t find anything against him. But they knew he was passionate about his faith. They knew he prayed consistently every day, three times a day. And these men who knew how to work the legal system and how to flatter the king, told the king that they wanted to come up with a law that for a mere 30 days, everyone must pray and worship only King Darius. What a flattering thought for a new king! In his naivety, he didn’t realize that they were setting up his most trusted advisor.

Our lesson picks up with Daniel learning about the king’s edict to not pray anymore or face the lions den, and Daniel sticks with his regular schedule of going home, walking up to the attic, opening the window and praying and thanking the Lord. He knew what the government mandate was and the consequences of it. He probably even knew people were watching. He maybe even knew he was being set up. But he decided that the health of his soul was more important than anything. He knew that standing up for the truth of God’s Word was far more important than even his own life. When you read through this lesson you can’t help but think, would I have done the same thing?

Today we are celebrating the Lutheran Reformation. According to a number of historians, they would say that it is the most significant event to happen in the last 1000 years. It all started with a monk who started to read the bible and realized that the truth of God’s Word and the key to our salvation in Jesus was not known. Everything came to a tipping point when Martin Luther had to stand up to one of the most powerful political forces at the time, the pope and the Catholic church. He found himself at the Diet of Worms, which he thought would be a chance to debate and explain to the Catholic church the truth of the bible, but no one there was interested in debate. Instead they gave him a choice. Renounce your writings and everything that you believe in or face the consequences. After much prayer, and little sleep, he came back, stood firm in his belief and risked his own life in doing so. When we think about what he went through, we ask that same question, would I have done the same thing? Would I have remained faithful to God’s Word against the threat of death?

The problem is that is a hypothetical question. We aren’t faced with the threat of death. In fact, we live at a very unique time and place in history where we can enjoy freedom of religion. This is not the typical life of a Christian: to be able to come and go to whatever church you want to, to be able to own a bible and believe whatever you want to without the threat of death. I read something this past week that talked about a Chinese Christian by the name of Chen Yu who was caught selling religious publications not authorized by the government. His punishment was a 7 year prison sentence and a \$30,000 fine. That happened this last month in China. There was something in the Wall Street Journal recently that talked about how China is working on a different version of the bible, getting rid of certain passages that are incompatible with “core socialist values.” In fact there are 45 countries in our world today that are considered high risk for Christians, and China isn’t even in the top 10. I read somewhere else recently that “More Christians died for the faith in the 20th century than in the previous nineteen centuries of Christian history combined.”

I say all this for a couple of reasons. Make you aware of how other Christians are suffering and being persecuted around the world today. And to encourage you to put them on your prayer list. And while we all seem to have something to say about our country right now, and politics, no matter who you are going to be voting for in the next week, we can all thank God for the government that we have, the relative peace that we get to enjoy especially when we consider the many problems that other

governments are going through both right now around the world and historically. We are truly blessed. Just because our life isn't being threatened like Daniel, or Martin Luther or other Christians, doesn't mean we don't have to work to remain faithful in what we believe. We falsely think that because we aren't faced with death, God's Word isn't under attack. Daniel didn't have to pray on the day that that edict was signed. He could have taken a day off. He could have shut his windows. But prayer was that important to him. He believed what the bible says about prayer. He knew that it was powerful and how much he and the world that he prayed for needed it. So he risked his life for one more prayer. Martin Luther didn't have to put his life at risk. He could have just kept the information that we are saved by grace alone, by faith alone and by scripture alone to himself.

Are we American Christians suffering from a lack of zeal to stand up for the truth? Instead of flourishing in our spiritual lives because we have that freedom, we are bored of it. It's easy to grow apathetic in the faith here in America. And maybe the reason is as simple as, if there is no threat of something being taken away, you don't appreciate it. Once it is threatened then we care about it more and fight to hold on to it. There is also a fear that when we do try to remain faithful to the Word of God that we are called strict, cold, closed-minded or old fashioned. I've heard those phrases used about Lutherans many times before. While we want to speak in love, we also have to speak the truth. They both must go together like wings of an airplane – truth and love.

And so I wanted to make this point that just because we are not being persecuted, doesn't mean that our spiritual life or the spiritual lives of others is not being threatened. The teachings that we are supposed to stand up for and fight for are not just doctrines or teachings in a vacuum that have no affect on the world around us. Let me give you some examples:

- Abortion has been turned into a political issue rather than what it really is, a biblical issue. 62 million children have been killed through abortions since 1973. The real issue is that their Time of Grace has been cut short, the time that God gives to people so that they can hear about their Savior and believe.
- Baptism – There are Christian churches all around us who will not baptize babies, because they believe something different than what the bible says about sin and how bad it is, and faith regarding how we receive it. Psalm 51 says that they are sinners and therefore need a Savior. So God has given them one tool to use to give them a Savior – baptism.
- Marriage - We are considered old fashioned or homophobic if we stand up for what the bible says about marriage. When God's design for marriage isn't followed, through sex outside of marriage, adultery, or homosexuality, it can cause complications to an already challenging spiritual life, that affects parents, kids and even grandkids.
- Creation - We are considered uneducated if we believe in a 6 day/24 hour creation. If we don't stand up and fight for a 6 day/24 hour creation, how are we going to convince them that the other chapters of the bible are true if we don't even believe the first one?
- We are considered intolerant if we declare that Jesus is the only way to heaven. As much as I would love to believe that God is going to send everyone to heaven regardless of whether or not they believe in Jesus, the bible doesn't allow us to say that. If the bible's wrong and we all end up in heaven, great. If the bible is correct and Jesus is necessary for salvation, than my neighbor and my friends and family need to know about that. These are just a few of the teachings of the bible. Every teaching of the bible has eternal consequences behind them if we don't stand up for them.

We look at these great men like Daniel, or Martin Luther or modern day Chinese Christians, and when we ask ourselves, if I was faced with imprisonment or death would I have remained faithful. I don't know. But what makes our faith worth fighting for is that God remained faithful to us, even when and especially when we haven't always remained faithful to him. He sent his Son, Jesus, who would have to face something far worse than lions. He would have to face the punishment of hell. But God had no intention of sparing him. There would be no rescue from the angels, like Daniel had, pulling Jesus off of that cross. He was abandoned. But that story isn't just a message of God abandoning his Son. Rather it's a story of God remaining faithful to us, a people who couldn't fight for themselves, a people who didn't deserve God's love at all. On the day of your baptism he made a promise to you as an individual that he was going to remain faithful to you and protect you.

And he continues to do that today. He reminds you that you are a forgiven child of God regardless of your past, regardless of your spiritual zeal. He reminds you of a heavenly home that he will take you to where persecution and threats of any kind will be gone. He sends his angels to be by your side. We have no idea how many disasters were avoided in our lives because God sent his angels to save us and help us. And that's important to know that when you do stand up for the truth of God's Word, you are never alone. Your God goes with you.

So where do we go from here. Because you aren't Daniel faced with a lion's den. And you aren't Martin Luther faced with becoming an enemy of the state. But you are someone who lives in America in the year 2020. God's Word continues to be attacked all around us. If we are going to remain faithful to it, we need first of all to know what God's Word says. I'm guessing that most, if not all of you, here could use a refresher on some teachings that are found in the bible. Jump into one of our bible studies. Get into God's Word. Ask one of your pastors for books or resources on specific subjects, or check out our library. The next step is to be like Daniel, in a certain sense. Something that was flattering to Daniel was that his enemies knew how faithful Daniel was to what he believed in. They knew that if this law would be passed, he would choose to go to the lions before he would worship any other god or even give up praying for a day. My prayer for all of us is that world sees us as people who will remain faithful to God's Word, because we know that souls depend on our faithfulness to it. Amen.