

Repeating His Story.

Text: Daniel 3:16-28 for 11/4/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

They say that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. But is repeating history always a bad thing? As we look at this portion of scripture from the book of Daniel we see an interesting repeating of history. As we study what happened to these three Jewish exiles and what happened to Martin Luther, it seems as though history is repeating itself, but in a good way.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were Jewish men who were taken from Israel into captivity in Babylon. Many in Judah and Jerusalem had gone into captivity in Babylon because people of Israel had rebelled against God. They turned to worshipping false gods and brought the true God's wrath upon themselves. But God protected his believers by sending them into exile away from Judah. Then God destroyed the unbelievers left in Judah through war and plague and famine. God wiped out Jerusalem and his temple. All the places where the people worshiped their false gods were destroyed.

These three young men were intelligent and quick learners. Because of their God given talents and knowledge they were soon serving in positions of leadership within the Babylonian government. Which was all well and good until Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, decided to try and unite all the different people he had captured under one religion.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was made up of people from all the different countries he had conquered: Syria, Edom, Moab, Israel, and Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar needed to unite these people under his political rule. To do that he worked to unite the people in faith under one, new god. The king presents to the people and their leaders a 90-foot-tall statue that will represent their new god. By worshipping this new god these people would be showing their allegiance to the king.

So Nebuchadnezzar brings together all his regional and local leaders and tells them, **"As soon as you hear the sound of [...] all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace"** (Daniel 3:5-6). And when the music plays, everyone falls down to worship except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They refused to worship this false god.

Of course, there were a number of people who did not like these young upstarts, so they tell King Nebuchadnezzar, **"You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of [...] all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon— Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up"** (Daniel 3:10, 12). So Nebuchadnezzar brings these men in front of him and gives them one more chance. He tells them that they are to worship his god, or he will have them burned in a blazing furnace.

This is where our text picks up the scene. These three young men are faced with a choice: either deny the true God and live or trust the true God and face execution. What would you do? These young men chose to trust in the one true God. They said to the king, **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 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. 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"** (vs. 16-18). These men don't deny they are defying the king's orders. Instead, they make it clear their God and their faith are far more important than the king's false god and false worship.

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This causes Nebuchadnezzar to fly into a rage. He orders the furnace to be made seven times hotter and ends up losing some of his strongest soldiers to the flames as they carry out the execution order. Yet in that moment when death seemed imminent God rescued these three faithful believers. God sends his angel to protect these men's bodies from harm. In amazement, Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the furnace to find that not only are they not burned, but they don't even smell like smoke!

These men put God and his glory ahead of their own lives. They proclaimed God's truth, and then they took their stand on that truth, trusting in the only God who could save both their bodies and their souls.

Martin Luther repeated that history. During his time as a Roman Catholic monk Luther began teaching Bible classes at the University of Wittenberg. The more Martin studied and taught God's word, the more he realized how the teachings of the Roman Catholic church had moved away from the Scriptures. Luther saw first hand how the Catholic church was promoting the false gods of legalism and work-righteousness.

Martin wanted to reform the Roman Catholic church and bring it back to the teachings of the One, true God. So Luther began to write, and debate, and teach the truths of what God was proclaiming in the Holy Bible. Martin Luther made it clear from Scripture that a person could only be saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, and that faith only comes to a person through the Scriptures alone.

But the leaders of the church did not like what Luther was teaching, not only the pope, but also the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The Emperor needed his people united under one, common, Roman Catholic religion. When Luther started to disrupt that unity, the Emperor felt he needed to put a stop to this renegade monk. So, Emperor Charles V called Luther to appear before him at the Diet of Worms, and there he gave Martin a choice: Either take back all of his teachings or be declared a heretic which would allow anyone to kill Luther on sight.

After wrestling with the decision for a night Martin appeared again before the Emperor the next day. When asked again if he would recant and take back his teachings Martin Luther stated, *"Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture—for I do not believe the pope or councils alone, since they have often made mistakes and have even said the exact opposite about the same point—I am tied by the Word of God I have quoted and by my conscience. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. God help me. Amen."*

This reply only enraged the Emperor who declared Luther a heretic. At that point Martin Luther packed up his things and boarded a wagon to return to Wittenburg, expecting he would be killed before he ever made it back. And Luther did not make it back to Wittenburg, not on that trip. God saved his servant, not by sending an angel, but instead by moving the heart and mind of a local prince, Frederick the Wise, to see the importance of what this monk named Luther was doing. Frederick sent a group of his men to kidnap Martin Luther. Then he had Luther hidden away at the Wartburg castle to keep him safe.

Martin Luther put God and his glory ahead of his own life. He proclaimed God's truth, and then he took a stand on that truth, trusting in the only God who could save both his body and his soul.

How willing are you and I to repeat this piece of history? While our government leaders are not trying to unite people under a single religion, there are some political groups that try to unite people under the banner of "Christianity," although you don't have too hard to see

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their teachings are not Christian. Sadly, these groups will often persecute Christians for standing firm on God's Word, especially when Christians point out how these groups have gone away from God's truth.

Yet when it comes to persecution and our faith I can honestly say that I do not know anyone from this church who has ever had to stand before a powerful political leader and defend their faith in the face of possibly execution. I am not aware of anyone at this church who has been threatened with physical harm, or death, because they took a stand on God's Word.

So how willing are we, really, to repeat the history of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Luther? Would you be willing to stand in their place and give the same bold testimony about God knowing you could die for speaking that truth? It's easy to say yes from the comfort and security of a church pew. But if your life was truly on the line would you put God, and his glory ahead of your own life?

That's not so easy is it. Especially when we realize how often we fail to put God first even when we are not being threatened. We meet new people and make new friends, we start at a new school or job, or move into a new neighborhood, yet we say nothing about the God we believe and trust in because we are concerned about our reputation. We don't want people to think we are weird. We want people to like us and accept us. So, if we are asked about our beliefs or our faith in God we water down the message, or perhaps we don't say anything at all. How often we fail when it comes to standing on Christ alone, and proclaiming his saving message to the world.

Thankfully we have a merciful God who is willing to do what it takes to save us from all of our enemies, even when the one we so often need saving from is ourselves. God willingly gave his Son to be our substitute. Jesus willingly proclaimed his Father's word, always standing on the truth of God's promises even when his own life was on the line. The difference between Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Luther, and Christ is that God did not save Jesus from those who condemned him to death. Instead, God allow his own Son to be executed for our sins so that he could save our souls from hell. Christ's death paid for all the times we failed to stand firm in God's promises and proclaim his truth. Through faith in Jesus' saving work you have forgiveness for all of your sins. Trusting in Christ you now have a living faith that guarantees you eternal life and emboldens you to live for God in this life.

In this living faith that our Lord has planted in your hearts, God does not expect you to repeat history. Instead, God motivates you with his love to repeat his story. All of history is God's story. God created this world and is continually working to sustain this world. And from the moment Adam and Eve fell into sin God has been working, carrying out his plan to save the human race from their sins. Woven all throughout this world's history we find God's saving words and actions.

You and I are a part of that history. We have experienced the saving power of God. Through the words and promises of Christ, God has saved us. We experienced the saving power of God's Holy Spirit at our baptism. We experience Christ's love and forgiveness when we come to his altar and share in his Holy Communion. We know what it's like to be saved by God. That experience fills our lives and faith with boldness. Like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Martin Luther our faith moves us to stand on Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation. That truth empowers us to put God and his glory ahead of our own life. It moves us to proclaim God's truth, and then take a stand on that truth, trusting in the only God who can

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save both our bodies and our souls. We repeat His story knowing that God has saved us before, and he can certainly save us again.

Moved by the saving love of our gracious God may we stand firm in his promises, trusting he will always do what is best for us. Our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, has given us his best. He has saved us from our sins, freed us from death and the devil, opened the gates to eternal life. And now Jesus is preparing that perfect place of refuge where we will be safe with him forever. Amen.