**Watch Your Worship**

Well, last week we learned a little more about King Nebuchadnezzar, who was undoubtedly one of the worst Kings or bosses in the history of the world. He was a tyrant, unstable, paranoid, alone, short-tempered, proud. You don’t become the ruler of an empire by being a nice guy and he wasn’t a nice guy.

Now, last week we saw how that God revealed to Daniel in a dream what King Nebuchadnezzar’s own dream was and its meaning. He had this dream about a huge statue whose head was Gold, the chest and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were bronze, and the legs and feet were iron and clay. And Daniel told him that King Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold and after him would come 3 other empires. And Nebuchadnezzar seems to make some sort of recognition of God, but it is short-lived.

**<Arrow>** So, what does any rational, paranoid King do? Let’s just make the whole statue out of gold and that will ensure I stay in power and my reign will last forever. And it’s huge, sixty cubics is like 27 meters tall. And he is going to try to use this statue to unite everyone together in worship of this statue, so he puts it in the special place and calls all his public officials to come to this dedication. So, it’s the special day and there are thousands of people gathered for this special event. And then, out of the blue, they here this voice. **<Arrow>**

*Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.*

You don’t have much time to think here. What do you do? And then the music starts playing and everyone is bowing down. The peer pressure is unbelievable. What do you do? You’re the only ones not bowing. And you begin to rationalize. Well, maybe this one time, God will understand. God put Nebuchadnezzar in power so I guess God wants me to obey him. I didn’t ask to be sent to Babylon, while in Babylon do as the Babylonians, right. This is just the local custom, it doesn’t mean anything. It isn’t hurting anyone. Our ancestors set up idols in God’s temple, so this isn’t nearly as bad as that. If we are killed, then some pagans will take our position and we won’t be able to help our people anymore.

Do you get the picture? I could probably come up with even more excuses than that. And I wondered to myself if I would have bowed down at that moment. How about you?

But for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they did not bow down. And I wondered, how did they do that? And I realized that they must have already decided that there were some things that they would never do. **<Arrow>**

*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God*

This is one of God’s 10 commandments. They learned this from an early age. This truth and this command was memorized and burned into their hearts. You do not do this ever, period. No exceptions, no excuses. This was a line in the sand that they had decided they would never cross and they didn’t.

In a world without absolutes, we have one stated here for us. It is still valid today. You have to believe in absolutes and you have to know them. If you don’t know these clear boundaries, you will be carried by peer pressure.

One side comment, some people look at this verse and say Look, the God of the Bible is petty and jealous. They see this as a character fault. I want to say something about this. What if you went out for a meal one evening and you saw me sitting with a young woman who is not Kathy and you come over and say hello. And I say, this is my date, so and so. And you say does Kathy know you are on a date? And I say, yes, it’s no problem, Kathy isn’t the jealous type. And you walk away (calling Kathy).

And when I get home that night and if I survive the first few minutes, and if Kathy hasn’t already changed the locks on the front door, then I calm her down by saying, why are you so jealous? Is that going to work? Is jealousy a negative emotion?

I think what most people don’t understand is that first and foremost, God loves us individually. He is our Creator. There is no other. He loves us deeper than a husband loves a wife and deeper than a mother loves her child. And when we love someone or something else more than Him, it hurts Him. If God wasn’t jealous, it would mean that He really doesn’t love us that much. But from the beginning of the Bible to the End, it is a great love story. Don’t ever forget that. God is jealous of our love. Be careful what you love more than God. That is an idol in your life.

Now, back to the story. **<Arrow>** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do not bow, but it does not go unnoticed. There are some astrologers that are resentful and envious of these 3 young Jewish men and they see this as an opportunity to get rid of them for good. So, they go to Nebuchadnezzar and after building up his ego, “May the King live forever!”, they tell the King of the guys who disobeyed his command. **<Arrow>**

And Nebuchadnezzar has a very short fuse, so he goes ballistic and brings them in and gives them one more chance. And he ends with a rhetorical question, “*Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?*” Now when you ask a rhetorical question, you don’t expect an answer; you are just making a point.

And as a parent, we like to ask lots of rhetorical questions. “How many times do I have to ask you to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?” Right, we don’t expect an answer. “Well, mom, about 3000 times should be enough, thanks for asking.”

Do you want me to get your Father? “Yes mother, I think that would probably be the wisest course of action right now.”

And depending on what type of punishment you have in your house; for us it is the smart phone. Do you want me to take your phone away for a week? “Well, I was going to check Facebook, but okay, sounds like a good idea to me. Here you go”

You don’t expect a response and if you get one, it just makes you even angrier. Right? So, what happens next? **<Arrow>**

They answer the rhetorical question! What God will be able to rescue you from my hand? The God we serve is able to deliver us from the blazing furnace.

This was not an easy thing to say. You are basically pronouncing your own death and it will be a horrible death being burned alive. I can’t think of a worse way to die. I am sure that after the big golden idol dedication, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that they would be in trouble. And you can see from their response, they had thought this through again and they had planned out what to say.

I see a very Intentional lifestyle here. They thought through things and reasoned together with good friends what was the most important thing in life. Often, we don’t stop in the busy-ness of life and think, what am I doing? Why am I doing that? We often go through life without reflecting at all and just trying to be entertained and enjoy ourselves.

But these 3 men believed that there are some things worth dying for? We have seen on the news pictures of some Christians being killed for their faith in Jesus in the last year. And if you are aware of the statistics, there are more Christians being persecuted and killed for their faith than ever before. We don’t have to worry about this now in Europe, but it will likely come one day here as well. We’ll talk about that at the end of Daniel as he gives us some predictions of the End Times.

I am glad that these guys had each other; it is much easier to stand strong when you have some close friends who also have faith in an all-loving and all-mighty God. And in the grand scheme of things, didn’t they make the right decision? If God exists, shouldn’t I choose Him over everything else in this world? Even my own life on earth. You and I are going to die regardless if we choose God or not. And when you are dead, what are you going to do to save yourself? God is our only hope. **<Arrow>**

You know a few weeks ago, I saw this article in the news. It’s official: The Universe is Dying slowly. Ever since the theory of the Big Bang, scientists have thought this, but now they have measured the loss of energy in several galaxies and they have proof that the useful energy in the universe if being used up. Eventually, there will be no light, no heat, no movement, no life; only blackness. If your hope is in mankind and science, you are going to be disappointed. There is no hope. There is no scientific way to avoid this reality. It will happen and there is nothing anyone on earth can do about it.

Now, this is still many billions of years away, but it is another absolute truth that people must deal with. And belief in a loving and all-powerful God who created the universe, that gives me hope. That being can save me from the blackness. Nothing is as important as my relationship with God, nothing. It makes no sense to choose something else here on earth, when it won’t save me. It may keep me out of the furnace, but that isn’t my biggest problem. **<Arrow>**

And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego understand this and so they make a wise decision. And they are not the only ones who have made this decision.

John Chrysostom was a Christian who lived in the fourth-century after Christ (A. D. 347-407) in Alexandria. He was perhaps best known for his eloquent and strong preaching which got him into trouble when he criticized the Emperor and his wife for the their opulent lifestyle. This put Chrysostom in a meeting with the Emperor who threatened to banish him if he did not stop his strong preaching. He responded, “*You cannot banish me, for the world is my Father’s house*.”

Next, the Emperor threatened to kill John, but he responded, “*You cannot kill me, for my life is hidden with Christ in God*.” Then the Emporer threatened to confiscate all his possessions. John replied, “*You cannot do that, either. My treasures are in heaven, where no one can break through and steal*.” Finally the frustrated Emporer came full circle and said, Then I will remove you from other men, and you will have no friends left! This final, desperate warning did not bother Chrysostom. He said, simply, “*You cannot do that either, for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you*.’”

All of John’s responses were passages from the Bible that gave Him the faith and courage to reply to the Emporer in the same way that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had done to Nebuchadnezzar. What we believe does make a difference in our lives and it impacts our decisions in life what we will serve?

And the question (not rhetorical) for you this morning is who or what are you worshiping? Watch your worship. We may not be tempted to bow down to a golden idol, but we will be tempted to live this life to get as much temporary happiness as possible and to heck with God’s plans for my life. I have everything mapped out. I am going to get this education and this job, this spouse, this many kids, this big house, this career, this retirement savings, these vacations. What are you worshiping? There is nothing wrong with those things, but you can’t hold on to them like this (hand closed), you have to hold on to them like this (hand open). And if you have to choose one day in keeping God’s commands or keeping one of these things, make the wise choice like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. If I have to choose, I choose God.

In this life, you will have many, many opportunities to make this choice. And God will put us to the test and see what we choose. It may be something small at first. He wants to know where your heart is. Remember, He is a jealous God and there is no room for anyone else in your life. Is there another lover in your life that is making God jealous? Not another person, although that can be the case, but something that you give your attention, your time, your energy, your love.

Now, I understand that your spouse and children and job and education all take time and energy and love. But we need to watch that balance between being responsible and being worshipful. You can worship your family and push God to the side. It can’t be like that. Your God is a jealous God and He will have no other gods before Him.

I don’t want to push this too hard or guilt anyone into doing this, but having a small group of other believers to encourage you to live out your faith in God is a big part of what we want to do with the Discipleship groups. And if you don’t have anything like this already, please consider joining one of these groups. **<Arrow>**

One final comment is their statement here that even if God does not save us, we will not serve your gods. You know, many people try to make deals with God, if you do this and that, then I will worship you. But that is not a relationship based on love, that is a business deal. God doesn’t want us to bargain with Him. It doesn’t work that way. Let God be God. We cannot understand His Ways and His Plans for the world. We can only be found faithful and available to play a role in His plans.

Remember that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were actually tied up and thrown into the fire. God does not tell us that we will have a problem free happy life. Actually, he says quite the opposite. Here’s what Jesus said. **<Arrow>**

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

**<Arrow>** And these words of Paul to Timothy.

*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*

If you have become a Christian to just get a comfortable life on earth, you will be disappointed because God is God and we are not in control. And it is not like life will be just pain and misery, but it can be tough. He promises that. **<Arrow>**

What we understand in this story is that God does NOT rescue them FROM the fire, but IN the fire. I am sure Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego if given the choice, they would have chosen not to get tied up and thrown into the fire. Right? We don’t choose suffering if there are other options, but sometimes there will not be and we have to choose God over everything else in life.

People we love are going to get sick and they will die. We may get sick and God may not rescue us from that fire. We don’t get perfect health insurance when we become a Christian, although some people still think this. God is God and we don’t have any control over whom He heals and whom He doesn’t. It is His will not ours.

We read a powerful story today of God’s miraculous working in our world. And I believe that God is working in miraculous ways today, but we have to have faith and choose Him over all else. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have to show up in the furnace, but they did. And I wonder how many other times, God has planned to show up in the furnace with us, but we didn’t show up. We were distracted with something else or chose something else. Maybe our choices are more important than we think. Be careful what you worship. Choose well in life.

**Closing Prayer and Closing Benediction <Arrow>**

*Dear brothers and sisters, Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.*

*Now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen*

**Communion**

Jesus said it in another way, even if God does not – not my will but thine be done.

When his disciples tried to stop it from happening, he told them that he could ask His father for 12 legions of angels to his protection if he wanted. But love won out and He didn’t ask, and instead He followed his Father’s will and it meant death on the cross. Another cruel death like death by fire, it just lasted longer.

1 Corinthians 11

Jesus told us to remember his sacrifice. We choose to identify now with Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

You don’t have to do this, it is your choice.

**Daniel 3:1-18**

*1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.*

*4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”*

*7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

*8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 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, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”*

*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, pipe 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 him, “King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”*