

July 3, 2022 He Is Our Peace Daniel 3:16-30

The issue was a simple one. Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Judah in war. Members of the royal family, and the government have been carried off in exile. However, exceptional young men, even though they are Jewish are a resource. Nebuchadnezzar gives them positions of influence in helping to govern his Kingdom. He respects their giftedness. However, he maintains his own faith and he rules with an iron hand.

In chapter 3 of the book that Daniel wrote, chronicling his experience, and testifying that the living God of Israel is in charge of the unfolding history of the world, Nebuchadnezzar has an idol cast in gold. The law is that everyone when they hear the music, must stop what they are doing and bow down to this golden image. It is what it is. An idol. And in accordance with the 1st of the 10 Commandments that God gave to Moses, no Jew is going to participate.

Politicians then as now look for advantage over their rivals. Babylonian astrologers report to the king that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do not obey the new law. When the music plays they do not dance as they ought to do. They do not bow down to the golden image. By law the punishment is death by means of incineration in a great fire furnace that has been built for the purpose. They are brought before the king who asks them if it is true that they do not

worship the image that has been cast in gold when the music announces the time.

The reply of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is startling in its tone, and its frankness. To summarize they declare an independence of spirit. “We do not have to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If you cast us into the inferno, our God will save us, and HE will rescue us from your hand.” It is a statement of faith. And the 3 who are accused make it plain they are prepared to accept any outcome. But on this one thing they will not compromise. “But even if our God does not save us and rescue us, we will not bow down to your gods.” It is a declaration that they are willing if need be to die the death of martyrs. Exiles or not, they serve the living God, and not an image cast in gold or stone, or wood.

The King is furious. The fires are lit. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are bound so that they can do nothing to try and free themselves. They are cast into the fires. Nebuchadnezzar is there to observe the carrying out of the sentence. And he cannot believe what he sees. “Were there not three who were tied up and cast into the flames?” And the reply comes quickly. “Certainly, O King.” Nebuchadnezzar replies, “Look. I see 4 walking around in the fire, unbound, unharmed, and the 4th looks like a son of the gods.” As always the KJV translating word for word is more precise. “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt. And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” Translated into the English of the Shakespearian era there are

capital letters on Son and on God. It is meant to be a reference to Jesus.

Nebuchadnezzar is so moved he calls them out of the furnace. The observation is made that they are indeed unharmed. Their hair is not singed. Their robes are not scorched. And they do not bare the smell of the fire or the smoke in any way. And Nebuchadnezzar is impressed. And the King praised the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And he was quoted as saying, "No other god can save in this way."

And you may well be saying to yourselves, and all I have done is tell the story in my own words with the help of the NIV and the King James Version. It begs the question, why is this story so important, that we in the year of our Lord 2022 would still tell it.

The late actor James Earl Jones, a black man, played many parts in many movies. But in the movie "Field of Dreams," subtitled "How Shoeless Joe Jackson came to Iowa," Mr. Jones played an author out of the hippie era in the early 1960's. The farmer who has ploughed under a significant part of his crop to build a baseball diamond is facing foreclosure and he cannot meet his mortgage. His child, a young daughter has just said, "Daddy you won't have to sell the farm people will come." And James Earl Jones in that rumbling bass voice of his says, "Yes, people will come Ray. People will most surely come. They will say can they watch. And you'll say, 'of course, just \$

20 to park the car. And they will hand it over for it is money they have and peace they lack.”

Peace. Peace. Peace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, exiles in a foreign land with Daniel and others from Jerusalem, obviously have a kind, and a measure of peace that eludes the powerful and wealthy of Babylon. In the midst of the fire, they are set free of their bonds, and they walk around in the company of the Son of God. It is not about the furnace. It is not about governments or systems of governance. It is about the living God who sent HIS Son into the world centuries after this story actually, to redeem people. To bring a peace into the world that only the Prince of Peace could bring. And HE gives it freely to anyone who will follow HIM. Here is the kicker in all these details.

This is not a metaphor nor an allegory. It is not a story set “Once upon a time!,” made up by an author who spun a good yarn. This is part of ancient history. Which is to say it happened. Daniel tells us a number of stories that are filled with the reality of the miracles of God’s grace. Daniel’s testimony is that the God of grace and love and redemption does indeed bless us with miraculous experience.

O it is true, the world will dispute that such things could not happen. The world will say if miracles are real do one. Herod made that demand of Jesus. Jesus would not play the game. And besides what Jesus understood was that HE was here in the world, to do something far greater than

convince Herod that miracles can happen in the presence of the Son of God. HE was here, in the world, and in the flesh of humanity, to redeem, anyone who hungers for the peace that passes understanding. For anyone who hungers for the grace of God, amazing grace! For peace that you do not have to pay for or buy, that you cannot earn by the sweat of hard work, but which you can receive as the gift of the loving living, God who made the universe and us, and all that is.

Nebuchadnezzar saw with his own eyes. Those who had been bound so that they could not resist their sentence were set free. They walked in the midst of the fire and were not hurt. Not even the smell of smoke on their robes. And they walked in the midst of the fire....with the Son of God.

The Old Testament has been called the rough guardian of the New. What that means is that God has not changed. HE made you. HE loves you. HE wants you to have the peace of mind and soul that can only be found by radical allegiance to HIM. As Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, "Even if God does not rescue us from your hand, (even if we die in the flames...that is what they meant) we will not worship other gods, or an image of Gold. We serve the living God who saves lives...even when people die. Eternal life. HE, the Son of God is our peace!

The Book of Daniel in the Old Testament declares that history is not made by people in their times. It addresses the question why are we here? History unfolds according the

will of a wise and loving God who redeems people in spite of themselves. HE is our peace.

Let us pray;

Lord we are tempted to say the world is a mess. We have witnessed the plague of the Covid pandemic. We see Russia's aggression attempting to crush Ukraine. Poverty abounds. Disease exists. And in the midst of it all Your word proclaims that YOU are God nonetheless and still. In times that try us and test us, bless us with the faith that will not falter. Help us to stand up for Jesus. Make us as single minded as the heroes of the Book of the Daniel. And may YOUR name receive the honour, the glory and the praise. Amen