

God Protects!

Sermon February 18, 2018 - Daniel 3:17-18

1. It seems that, in these days, those who hold to God and his word in all circumstances sooner or later will get into trouble.

This is the story of Daniel's friends from the 6th century before Christ. The people of Israel did not repent according to God's expectation, the LORD allowed Babylon to destroy the land of Israel, and the people were taken to Babylon for slavery.

There were four young teenagers from the royal family, who were totally faithful to God: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This is their story.

Nebuchadnezzar was a dictator. If he gave a sign with one of his hands, his army was moving or heads were falling. Nobody dared to say or do anything against him. As a dictator, he wanted to be feared and praised as a god.

By his order, a huge golden statue was created which symbolized him and his power. The statue was 30 metres (100 feet) high and 3 metres (10 feet) wide. The king ordered that, periodically during holidays, people had to gather around it and bow their knees and heads to worship the statue. It was also ordered that if anyone disobeyed during this worship, they would be dropped into a burning furnace.

Try to imagine this next scenario. The big day comes. A lot of people are forced to gather around the statue. The dictator is present. The musicians are also present. Thousands and thousands of knees and heads bow down before the golden statue.

But, ... look, ... there are three heads which are standing out from the crowd. They did not bow their knees and neither their heads. Why not? They don't know what to do? They know exactly what they were ordered to do by the dictator.

But they also know what their God says to them in the Second Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I am the LORD your God".

When they were forced to worship the idol, the Second Commandment came into their minds. If they didn't worship the idol, but only God, they could be thrown into a burning furnace. For their faith, they could pay with their lives. It is interesting to see that their fear of God was bigger than their fear of the king of Babylon. God was more precious to them than the king or their lives. They lived in Babylon, but in their hearts, God reigned. The law of the king would not override the Ten Commandments. When the king found out that these "rebels" did not

worship the idol, he became very angry and ordered that they had to die, even though they were his advisors and faithful servants.

If this happened today, some people would say to these three guys: “Are you crazy, man? Is this a big deal for you to bow your knees and heads for 10 minutes before that idol? Everybody does the same. Why do you think you should be so stubborn? Do you know that now you will be dropped into the burning furnace? Did you lose your mind?”

No! These three faithful men did not lose their minds. They did not lose their faith either in the only Living God, who alone can be worshipped.

I want to remind you what Jesus said to his disciples, when He prepared them as missionaries. This is what He is saying to his children today, here and now: “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; ...Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of Me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.” Matthew 10:16-18

This is a difficult task: to be a lamb amongst wolves. The lambs cannot protect themselves. They cannot bite, they cannot kick. The lambs cannot protect themselves but their shepherd can. If we have a strong connection with our Lord Jesus Christ, He will protect us in a difficult situation. He will carry our burden, and He will protect us with his shield.

Jesus Himself was attacked many times by our biggest enemy, but He was faithful to His Father to the end, and this is how He was able to return to His glory.

2. The children of God cannot be intimidated. They know to whom they belong.

The king didn't know who can be more powerful than him. For some people even today, even amongst us is hard to see that there is somebody more powerful than we are.

The king had the power to order that they have to be dropped into the burning furnace. “The rebellious have to be punished. They have to die. They have to see with whom they were putting up” – this was the slogan of the king.

The scripture said the furnace was so hot that even those people who dropped them into the fire got burned and died.

The king knew that these three men were his most reliable, trustworthy, honest, and intelligent servants. He started to regret what he did to them. For this, he came back to take a look at the furnace, wondering what happened to them.

And then ... he was shocked because of what he saw. These men were walking in the fire.

First of all, he was amazed because they were alive! Then they were walking, although they were tied up with ropes. Where were the ropes? And then, the king started to count: one, two, three, four. How many are they? There are too many. Only three people were dropped into the furnace, and now there are four. And he said that the fourth man was like a God or Son of God. He called them by their names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And now the king said something interesting ... “the servants of Almighty God ... come out from the furnace”. And only three people came out: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

We read that: “The governors, and the king’s counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.” Daniel 3:27

The king did not only rehabilitate these high officials, reinstalling them into their offices, but He created and published a decree as we read:

“Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king’s command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.’ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.” (Daniel 3:28-30)

Please note that these three men knew their employer, but they knew that their God was above their employer. They respected the king, but they feared God the most. They knew how much power the king had, but they also knew how much power God has. They knew that the king could destroy them, but they knew that God could save them from the king.

Day by day, we are challenged in many ways, but we always have to remember who our God is and what His expectations are for us. We have to respect and serve our employers as faithful workers, but we have to know that, if our employers asks something from us to do which is against God's law, we should rather listen to our God. Our Lord will care for us, and He will pay us for our faithfulness. People can drop us in a burning furnace, but God can deliver us IF this is His will. If not, then even death will take us closer to Him and His eternal glory. His will be done.

If we know this, and if we will act accordingly, we will be delivered from so much unnecessary anxiety and stress.

3. What gave these three men power to stay so solid and unmovable and what can give us this power today?

a. The word of God, what they learned from their parents, grandparents. The parents and grandparents took their responsibility seriously, and they taught their children to memorize the Ten Commandments and to obey God. These three men as teenagers inherited and copied a living faith.

Your faith can have a huge impact on your children's lives. Maybe you won't see the impact right away, but if you take your faith seriously, they will take it seriously, too. Please teach them day by day about God and the Word of God will do its work in their heart. If their friends go with the flow, they will have faith, and spine to stand up for themselves and do what God wants them to do. They will be able to decide between good and bad. In the past, I often heard people saying that in a difficult moment they recalled a Golden verse and God reminded them what they have to do. As we see, first of all, the word of God gave them strength and wisdom.

b. Secondly the community. The four men, as brothers, stayed together and prayed together. In a previous chapter, we read that, in a crisis moment, Daniel ran to his friends, asking them to pray with him, so God would help him in a difficult situation.

Do you have a community with brothers and sisters from this congregation with whom you can pray for healing, for wisdom, for guidance? It is so important to have Christian friends in our lives who can help us, comfort us, guide us and pray with us in time of need.

Secondly, the community gave them strength.

c. And thirdly the son of God gave them strength.

Jesus Christ came into this world, into “fire” to be with us when we suffer and to comfort us.

This story is teaching you and me to take the courage to be different than this world is. Act differently than others are acting. Come to the church, read the Bible, pray. Keep the word of God in your heart, and God will keep you in every situation and always. Amen