

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

02 June 2024

Standing Firm

Trust God and Take Your Stand.

Can you stand firm in your beliefs?

Interesting fact: Children who go to school at an early age identify with the group.

Children who are homeschooled until eight or ten are independent and become leaders in their school class.

So children imprint with the authority around them.

Either parents or their social group.

I was lucky, being fiercely independent, I never cared all that much what my classmates thought of me.

I never fit in anywhere.

I was not accepted at home or at school.

I turned to God at an early age.

My saviors, humanly speaking, were my grandfather Price and Grandmother Pineo.

They affirmed me.

All this is to say that it is easy for me to make a stand that is not accepted by those around me.

How about you?

Can you make a stand that is not the norm of those around you?

Our Text for today is: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . . We will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up". *Daniel 3:17-18*.

Our religious faith may lead us into the fires of affliction and tribulation.

It will be that way before Jesus comes.

And when it does our faith will lead us safely through to the other side.

Daniel's three friends learned this truth, and the recording of it through God's divinely inspired messenger has blessed the world for centuries.

More than a story from the past, this account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is as relevant as tomorrow's sunrise.

As long as selfish people with large portions of personal pride and ambition try to dominate faithful servants of the Lord, this story will speak its message afresh.

Dedication

Nebuchadnezzar comes across as a strange character.

One would think he had learned his lesson from two previous encounters with Daniel, but apparently he soon forgot the lessons he had learned concerning the simple food the Hebrews ate and the dream Daniel interpreted.

The king had a gold statue made that was ninety feet high and nine feet wide and set it up in the Plain of Dura.

He then gave orders for all his leaders to come together to dedicate his statue.

The decree was sent forth that when the music started, everyone was to bow down and worship this golden monstrosity that Nebuchadnezzar had established.

Moreover, anyone who refused to do so would be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Dilemma.

For a short time, Daniel's three friends, who had remained faithful to their God even in a foreign land, faced the choice.

What would they do?

No doubt they did not debate long.

They realized at the very first where their loyalties lay; and with a good spirit, but also with firm conviction, they refused to honor the king's request.

In today's world, few people are called on to face such a traumatic choice, although the number does seem to be growing in certain areas; but we are often faced with the responsibility of taking a personal stand for God though it means a certain kind of oppression.

To be ostracized socially or to be discriminated against economically can hurt a lot.

Those who suffer such tribulation must often feel they could stand the physical torture more easily than peer pressure or financial hardship.

We all have our "fiery furnaces" regardless of our station in life.

Faith, however, is able to triumph over every difficulty and trial.

The same principle that enabled Moses to suffer affliction with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season caused these exiles to rise above the fear of a fiery furnace.

Of course, these willing martyrs, committed to God's will for their lives, must also have been aware that it may not be God's purpose to deliver them from the perils of death.

If not, they reasoned that it would be far better to be carried heaven ward on the fiery chariot of martyrdom.

The words "and if not" are among the most sublime words ever written or spoken.

They represent the conviction that one who trusts God must hold to the very end.

Another great man of God likewise affirmed his faith when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." *Job 13:15*.

Such triumphs of faith over adverse circumstances stand as glorious achievements attained through the help of God's Holy Spirit.

Possessing clear insight into the truth that the voice of duty must be obeyed will lead one to defy every combination of opposing forces.

Deliverance

A foretaste of what would happen came when those who put the three men into the furnace were burned to death because of the exceedingly hot flame.

Although the death of these executioners seems to have attracted no special notice, the fact that the flames did not immediately consume Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego must have held some promise of a favorable outcome.

The miraculous story reached its climax as the people saw four persons rather than three in the furnace.

Looking at the story from this side of Calvary, we have no problem identifying the visitor.

He was more than a "son of the gods," as some translations render it.

He was the second member of the Trinity.

We have here a brief pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Only one choice was available for the king.

He must investigate and act on the evidence.

The deliverance was followed by a royal decree.

How long Nebuchadnezzar's resolution lasted is not the question.

The point is that God protects his own and turns the wrath of sin to his glory.

Throughout history this drama has been reenacted in various forms as people have dared to stand firmly and without fear.

These three men had faith and were delivered.

Faith is not trying to believe in spite of the evidence; it is daring to do in spite of the consequence.

An element of the first may be present, but the essential part of faith is complete commitment.

Only then is it saving faith.

Although many lessons may be gleaned from the story, one stands out supremely.

God never forsakes his faithful followers, as Samuel Longfellow said so well in his poem "In Every Need".

There is an eye that never sleeps

Beneath the wing of night.
There is an ear that never shuts,
When sink the beams of light.
There is an arm that never tires
When human strength gives way.
There is a love that never fails
When earthly loves decay.
They Eye unseen still watcheth all;
That Arm upholds the sky;
That Ear doth hear the sparrow's call;
That love is ever nigh.

One Christian of another generation said when he faced a great crisis in his life, "My head is resting sweetly on three pillows, Infinite Power, Infinite Wisdom, and Infinite Love."
God gives us strength to solve our problems when this is the need; but when they are too big for us, he intervenes miraculously and delivers.
In the fiery furnace, God showed his great power by performing a supernatural act to bring salvation.
He also performed such a deed at Calvary because humans were unable to atone for their own sin.
Trust God always and do what is right.
He will never leave one of his loved ones nor force that one to walk alone.
I know for He has been my friend all of my life!
And He is yours also.
God is for us, so nothing can overtake us, ever!
Know it. Believe it. Live it!