

Friday, May 22, 2020

Devotional Thoughts from Pastor Jim Murr...

"But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.'"

(Daniel 3: 15-18)

Most of you likely remember the context of this passage. SMA (Shadrach/Meshach/Abednego) were being pressured to worship the gods of Babylonia where they were in exile. They were being threatened with the fiery furnace, which was the punishment for refusing to worship these false gods. But even as they were standing near the entrance of the furnace, feeling its heat, and seeing the flames, they were still unwilling to worship the false gods. They were even willing to be thrown into the furnace, but NOTHING was going to persuade them to worship any god besides the Lord, their God!

The COVID-19 pandemic is like a fiery furnace. Nobody wants to fall into that furnace. No one wants to get the virus, and they especially don't want to get a severe case of it. Sadly, many people have fallen into that furnace. Others have not fallen into the furnace yet, but they can feel the heat of the furnace. Some are closer to the furnace than others: people with loved ones who have been diagnosed with the virus, healthcare workers, law enforcement, fire fighters, paramedics... Some have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. (Does that count as falling into the furnace or as being near enough to the furnace that they can feel the heat?)

Every Christian ought to be amazed at the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. No matter what, they were not going to forsake the God they have known. They believed that God would save them from the furnace, but they said even if He did not save them from the furnace, they would still remain faithful to Him. What do you think of that?

I have to imagine that if SMA were living right now in the midst of this pandemic, they would stand as amazing examples of faith for us. I believe they would talk the same way that they spoke to King Nebuchadnezzar. I think they would say, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from this pandemic, but even if He does not..." What might that mean? What would it look like for God NOT to save someone from the coronavirus? It might mean that a person contracts it. It might mean that a person dies from it or a loved one dies from it. It might mean that their business is lost.

I imagine SMA saying, "but even if He does not save us from this coronavirus, we will never turn our backs on God. We will never say that He has let us down, or that His love has failed us." God is a sovereign God. He always does SAVE those who put their trust in Him, but He determines what the SAVING looks like. SMA ended up in the fiery furnace, but they did not burn up. In fact, they came out of the furnace just as well as when they went in. I think that was more for King Nebuchadnezzar's sake than it was for SMA's sake. SMA would have gone right to heaven if they died in the furnace. No big deal for them! But God brought them out of the furnace so that Nebuchadnezzar and many others in Babylonia would be impressed by the God of Israel!

After they came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him." This would not have happened if SMA had turned their back on Yahweh. They would not have been thrown into the furnace, but God's Name would not have become known in Babylonia! God's Name is lifted high when God's people trust in Him no matter what. Others see that in God's people, and, at the very least, they become curious about this faith known as Christianity.

God's peace!
Pastor Jim