



This Week's Announcement:

Wednesday Night Christian Education classes start Wednesday Night June 7th. There will be a class on Parenting, one on Apologetics (difficult issues in faith) and another TBA.

QUESTION: As we finish our last session of Life Groups, what is one way that you have seen God work in your life or in our group this year?

Living in Exile

This week Pastor preached from the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel chapter three. The story centers on three Judeans who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar and brought into the royal court. We are going to start our study this week in the book of Jeremiah. In chapter 29, Jeremiah is giving instruction to those who, like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego have been taken into exile. Let's read Jeremiah's instructions now:

¹ This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining exiled elders, the priests, the prophets, and all the people Nebuchadnezzar had deported from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² This was after King Jeconiah, the queen mother, the court officials, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metalsmiths had left Jerusalem. ³ He sent the letter with Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The letter stated:

⁴ This is what the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Find wives for yourselves, and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your

daughters to men in marriage so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease. ⁷ Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive.” (Jeremiah 29:1-7, CSB).

While many false prophets were promising the exiles that they would be returning from exile very soon, Jeremiah emphasizes that it was part of God’s plan that they remain in exile for many years. But while living in the enemy empire, they are to work for the good of its capitol city. Although they had been taken from their homes and lives in Judah, they were to build new homes and lives in Babylon.

In the New Testament, believers are also referred to as exiles and strangers living in a foreign land (1 Peter 2:11). Wherever we find ourselves building our lives we know that our true citizenship is in the kingdom of God. And like the Babylonian exiles, we work for the benefit of our communities while remembering that we belong to another kingdom.

Question: What would be some practical ways that we can work for the benefit of our communities while recognizing that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God?



Shadrach, Meschack, and Abednego had been removed from their homes and families and found themselves in the service of the king who had taken them captive and would soon destroy the city that had been their home. These young men, along with Daniel, were doing as God had told them through Jeremiah. Though far from home, they were serving in their new circumstances. With God’s help they were excelling in their new roles until they found themselves in a situation that would create a conflict between the earthly king that they served, and their true king. Let’s read from Daniel chapter 3:

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue, ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to assemble the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces to attend the dedication of the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges,

magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces assembled for the dedication of the statue the king had set up. Then they stood before the statue Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 A herald loudly proclaimed, “People of every nation and language, you are commanded: 5 When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall facedown and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 But whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.”

7 Therefore, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and every kind of music, people of every nation and language fell down and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever. 10 You as king have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music must fall down and worship the gold statue. 11 Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12 There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”
(Dan 3:1-9, CSB).

Nebuchadnezzar had benefitted from the service and commitment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but the king wanted more. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the kind of loyalty and devotion that we are to give only to God. If the three had not been so successful in the king’s service, it might have been easier for them to defy his orders, but now they were faced with defying the king that they had served and who had placed them in positions of authority. Nevertheless, it was clear that the king had crossed the line and that the loyalty he asked for could not be given.

QUESTION: How can we know when a human institution (community, company, country) is asking too much of us?

Render to God what is God’s

Like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, Jesus had people attempt to trap him in a way that would put him at odds with the foreign occupying empire of his day, Rome. Let's read from Luke chapter 20 and see how Jesus answers them:

²⁰ They watched closely and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, so that they could catch him in what he said, to hand him over to the governor's rule and authority. ²¹ They questioned him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and you don't show partiality but teach truthfully the way of God. ²² Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

²³ But detecting their craftiness, he said to them, ²⁴ "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" "Caesar's," they said.

²⁵ "Well then," he told them, "give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

²⁶ They were not able to catch him in what he said in public, and being amazed at his answer, they became silent (Luke 20:20-26, CSB).

Those who questioned Jesus were trying to place him in conflict with Rome. Jesus's answer not only avoids this conflict, but it emphasizes an important point about what is owed to Caesar (or any nation). Jesus says that the coin is Caesar's because it bears his image. In saying this, Jesus implies that what belongs to God bears the image of God. That's us! We were created in the image of God, and still bear it. Jesus suggests here that Caesar may have his tax, but we must not give ourselves to any empire, nation, or anything in this world. We must never render to Caesar what is God's.

QUESTION: What do you think is included in what must be rendered to God only? What does it mean to give God ourselves?

With us in the Fire

Returning to Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, we find them faced with the consequence of disobeying the King. Let's begin reading in verse 19, after the three have defied Nebuchadnezzar:

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, ²⁰ and he commanded some of the best soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹ So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes, were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. ²² Since the king's command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm.

“Yes, of course, Your Majesty,” they replied to the king.

²⁵ He exclaimed, “Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. ²⁷ When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king's advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ (Daniel 3:19-28, CSB).

God miraculously rescued Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the furnace. Not only did he save them from harm, but he did not leave them alone in the fire. In the same way, we can be assured that no matter what we go through, we can count on God's presence with us.

QUESTION: God could have saved them from the furnace in other ways. Why do you think it was important that there was a fourth in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

Prayer

Take the time to check on prayer requests from last week and pray for any new or continuing needs in the group. Give praise to God for answered prayer.