

October 21, 2007

The SMA Covenant

Last week we began a new sermon series that would focus on individuals who lived for the Lord. Individuals that would exemplify what righteous living is all about. People who were devoted to serving the Lord, individuals like Daniel who understood the covenant that they and we live under. The covenant established with Abraham in Genesis 17 and then continues to all Christian believers today. It's that two-way agreement or promise where God says, "I will be your God" and we say, "We will be your people". Or as Moses and St. Peter put it, "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy." That word holy is the key holy means devoted, set apart or consecrated to. Jesus himself is the Holy One of God He is the Son of God who set himself apart for our salvation. Now our response is to set ourselves apart for Him. The people we are and will be looking at are people who set themselves apart for God devoted themselves to His service. They understood the covenant, they understood what God was saying and this was their motivation for their devotion in their life. As a result they experience trials and as a result they saw the triumph of their God.

Last week Daniel had a little trial involving some unclean food. He had been taken captive to the land of Babylon. He had been put into the king's service and he was going to be trained and fed according to the king's standards so that he could be a part of basically the king's cabinet. But Daniel, we saw, resolved himself not to defile himself and sin against God. He experienced triumph as he and his three Jewish companions were found to be ten times better than all the wise men in Babylon this after their three years of training. If we follow the story line into Daniel chapter two Daniel continues to live by the covenant. Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream and wanted to know what it meant. He called in all of his good 'ol boys the enchanters, astrologers, magicians and sorcerers and he gives them a task that we find in Daniel 2:3-5. He says, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." He then goes on and says, "This is what I have firmly decided if you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it I will cut you into pieces and

your houses turned into piles of rubble.” This is Nebuchadnezzar’s version of preventing a scam and that’s quite a trial. Not only does he want to know the interpretation he figures if his guys are truly wise they’ll be able to tell him what the dream was. The enchanters, sorcerers, magicians and astrologers figure they must have misunderstood Nebuchadnezzar and they repeat, “Oh King live forever tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it.” To which Nebuchadnezzar gives his chilling response, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided. If you do not tell me the dream there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things hoping the situation will change so then tell me the dream and I will know that you can interpret it for me.” All of the wise men then come clean and their honest they say, “There’s not a man on earth that can do what the king asks.” No king however great and mighty has ever asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult no one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they do not live among men. Nebuchadnezzar’s response? This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon so this would be Daniel’s second trial.

The commander of the king’s guard is sent to arrest him. Daniel asked to speak to the king and then Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar for 24 hours so that he could pray. He comes back and in verse 26 the king asks him, “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?” Daniel gives him a very honest answer, “no wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.” And Daniel proceeds to tell him the dream and its meaning. The triumph, after giving him his dream and its meaning, we see in verse 48, “then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him he made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all his wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon. Meanwhile Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

What a triumph he now has been promoted, he’s right in the king’s court, his three buddies have all been promoted over all the wise men, what a tremendous triumph. But yet as the beginning of the next trial that we will focus on today for in the very next verse in

Daniel 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar makes a 90ft high statue. He commands everyone to bow and worship it when the musical call is given this would be much like what we see in the Islamic countries today. The trumpet sounds and the people bow down facing the idol and pray. The difference is that Nebuchadnezzar puts a little bit of encouragement or motivation with his edict. In verse 6 he says, "whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown in to a blazing furnace." You're probably thinking now there's the trial. Do they follow the king's command or do they follow the first and second commandments? And you would be half correct because there is another hidden trial. I want you to think back now if you were one of the enchanters, magicians or astrologers who couldn't tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream or interpret it and then this outsider this Hebrew he came in and he tells the dream and gives the interpretation and is then promoted to be your boss how would you feel? Now throw in this Hebrew told the king about his three buddies and the king promoted all of them too I would imagine that we would all be a little miffed and so we see in verse 8, "At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews." You see we have some racial tension here too and continuing in verse 12 they say to the king, "But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of Babylon Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who pay no attention to you O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." They won't do it and the other astrologers the ones that are a little miffed because they've been shown up they are going to point it out to the king. When they give this information we see that he was furious with rage and he calls for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Yet we see an interesting approach when he brings them in. He obviously values them because he asks them, "Is it true Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that you do not serve my god or worship my image of gold that I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made then good but if you do not worship it you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace then what God will be able to rescue from my hand?" In essence he says maybe you didn't understand now do what I say and all is forgiven but if you don't I'll have to kill you. Then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand?

And think about what that says about Nebuchadnezzar's own faith in the gods. He doesn't really believe that the gods can

intervene in human life. Nebuchadnezzar is a theist. He says there's gods but they really don't do much or as his astrologers said earlier they do not live among men. Compare that kind of response about god then what god will be bale to rescue you from my hand? With the response of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo that we heard in our reading this morning they say to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." They are following right in the footsteps of Daniel, they are following the advice that King David gives in Psalm 50:15, "Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will honor me." Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo know the covenant they understand they are God's people and that He is their God. They understand they are just servants Gods' plan for them might be deliverance which they make clear they know God can do. They also know that it might not be God's plan to deliver them, which they make clear, is okay with them. Either way they will not defile themselves and break the covenant they will not fall down and worship this golden idol they are going to stay the course with their God.

Just as with Daniel their motivation is their love of God and respect for the covenant. The result, triumph. They are tossed into the furnace, which was so hot that it killed the soldiers that threw them in, yet when King Nebuchadnezzar looked in he saw the three of them and an angel also walking around in the fire. When they came out not a hair on their body was singed there was no smell of smoke on their clothes and the ropes that had bound them had burned away but did not burn them. A mighty miracle has happened God has come down and lived among His people, God has acted and when Nebuchadnezzar sees this, his response is two-fold. First of all he makes a decree and he says, "I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into rubble for no other God can save in this way." And the n the king promoted them in the province of Babylon. One final result though it is not written but I am absolutely positive that they did fulfill the second half of Psalm 50:15 where King David says, "Call on me in the day of trouble I will deliver you and you will honor me." Its part of

the covenant God is saying you call on me I'll see you through it then you honor me.

May we like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo take the covenant serious. May we live by the covenant and honor God as He fulfills His covenant with us.

In our Savior's name, Amen.