



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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January 30, 2011

Epiphany 4

Sermon Text: [Daniel 3:13-27](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Daniel 3:13-27](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 37](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 1:26-31](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

Worship God Alone

Trust in His Power

Trust in His Wisdom

The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace is a familiar story from Scripture. It's an amazing story. It's one I look at every year with the kids when we look at the First Commandment. Whenever we study the First Commandment, we end up looking at the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace. The First Commandment says you shall have no other gods. Luther said we should fear, love and trust in God above all things. This is certainly an incredible example of fearing, loving and trusting God more than your own life or more than the king who could take your life.

It kind of leads to an interesting question. Worshiping God, don't bow down and worship this idol, but worship God. It makes you wonder, what is worship? If someone were to come up to you and ask you, "What is worship?", you'd probably start talking about when we come together here in church, right? That's what we think of as worship. That's how we are worshiping our God. It certainly is one way we worship. But the truth of the matter is that we are worshiping God at all times. We are either worshiping him faithfully or worshiping him unfaithfully.

We are presented with all kinds of opportunities during the week to either love God or love ourselves or someone or something else more than God. That's really what it comes down to...loving or trusting something. That is a form of worship.

Think about it...worship, loving something...did you grow up in a house when you were a kid where maybe mom had this set of figurines she just absolutely loved and you found out just exactly how much she loved them or worshiped them when you broke one because you were playing with one you weren't supposed to play with and you should have known better. You found out just how important it was to mom. Or maybe it was dad. Maybe he loved reading the paper or watching sports on television and if you interrupted that, you found out that's what he loved and you shouldn't interrupt that. There are things that we love that we in a sense worship, but it doesn't go beyond our worship of God. The things we love, the things we show love for, that's how we worship. So this opportunity to show love for God in our daily lives is our worship life as well as sitting here in a church service.

We are reminded today that even when our senses are screaming at us to worship something other than God, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's senses must

have, God still desires that we worship him above everything else. Part of that worship is trusting in his power, as we see these three guys. Part of that worship is trusting in his wisdom, as we also see these three guys do.

So these three guys...who were they? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are the names given to them when they got crated off to Babylon, like Daniel, who also went with them. Daniel was given the name Belteshazzar when he was taken there. When Nebuchadnezzar's army first conquered Jerusalem, they took the best and the brightest from among the children of Israel to come back and serve them in their kingdom. I suppose they figured if you take the best and brightest out of the land, the land is not as much of a threat to you. So these four guys, Daniel and these three guys, were taken back to Babylon and were trained and educated by the king. They were to eat from the king's table, the choicest of food, so they could be strong enough and smart enough to serve the king better. But eating from his table would have involved doing things God said not to do...eating foods that God had told them not to eat. So Daniel says to this guy, "We can't eat this. Let us eat what we want and it will be alright." The guy says, "I have to keep you strong. If you are just going to eat all those vegetables and not this good pork that I have here for you, then you aren't going to be strong enough and it will be my tail that is in trouble." But the Lord moved this guy's heart, and Daniel convinced him, and when they went through all the training, they were as strong as the rest and they did better than anyone else. If they would have been giving speeches at the end of all this training, one of these four guys would have been giving it. It says they did the best.

They were serving the king in different places. They were all put in the province of Babylon, surrounding the area of the capital city where Nebuchadnezzar was. You get the idea that Nebuchadnezzar flew into rage a lot just from what I read to you, right? There's another time when he kind of flew into rage right before this took place. He had a dream that really troubled him. He wanted his wise men to interpret the dream. So he gathered them all together and said "Guys, I had this dream. It really bugs me. You have to tell me what it means." They said, "You bet king. We'll tell you what it means. Tell us what it is." Nebuchadnezzar says, "If you're so wise, you tell me what the dream is and then you tell me what it means." They look at him like he is nuts. "I can't tell you what your dream was! No one on earth could tell you what your dream was." They had to be thinking "You're goofy king," but they couldn't say that out loud.

So Nebuchadnezzar then goes into a rage and says, "If you can't tell me what my dream is, you're not the wise men that I thought you were, so I'm going to kill you all. So tell me what my dream was or you are going to die." No one could tell him, so they gather all the advisors and they bring in Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego so they can kill them. Daniel says, "What's going on? Why are we being put to death?" That's a logical question, right?

It's explained to him. So they spend the night in prayer and pleading with the Lord to reveal this to them. Daniel goes to the king the next day and says, "King, I can tell you what your dream was." He tells him what the dream was. This was about the statue

that went gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. He told him what it meant, and Nebuchadnezzar spared all the wise men's lives because of what these guys did.

I tell you that because it's kind of interesting that now, here's this great big statue, 90 feet high and 9 feet wide is kind of the dimensions that are given for it, and the king tells them all to bow down. He had all this music playing. It's not a concert. It's meant just to intimidate and say, "Look at the king. He's pretty cool." When you hear the music, bow down, and that will be the way you show you love the king because you worship his god that he has made. When these three guys wouldn't do it, some of the guys that had to be the people whose lives were spared by what they did went to the king and said, "Hey, these three guys didn't bow down to you." You have to wonder why they would do that if they had just spared their lives? They are foreigners from another country and they are young, so on the one hand, you have the jealousy of these guys being promoted above them because of what they had done, and on the other hand you have "Hey, I'm still breathing. That's pretty cool." And that fights against each other, and look what wins out...jealousy. It's kind of interesting that they say, "Hey, king, these guys that saved our lives, they didn't bow down and worship you. You better kill them. You said you would. Go do it. That way I can move up the wise men ladder."

It's a good thing you and I are never like that, right? It's a good thing you and I never get jealous of what someone else has. It's a good thing you and I value our brothers and sisters in Christ and never ever attack them. We have the same stinking sinful nature clinging to us, don't we? It's a harsh reminder, but it's true.

So the king brings the three in and says, "Guys, I like that you could interpret that dream for me, so guess what? I'll give you another chance. I'll play the music again. You can fall down, and everything will be good and we'll carry on with our life." Notice what they said to him...they put their trust, not in the king; they had to be able to tell...blazing furnace means death. Falling down means life. Their sinful nature had to be screaming, "Just bow down. It's easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to do what is right." You've heard that said, right? You can't serve your God, you can't share his Word if you're dead. There's all kinds of rationalizations and excuses for doing what God had said not to do. But they put their trust in God's power. They said, "King, you can throw us in this all you want. Our God has the power to save us from it. He can do that. That's the kind of God we serve. He isn't something that is crafted by human hands. He is the God who made the world and has given us fire, and if he wants to keep the fire from hurting us, he'll do it." They trusted in his power.

As we see, that trust was not misplaced. The king gets upset and gets the strongest guy to tie the knots. I don't know why. If you are throwing someone into a fiery furnace, I'm not worried about them untying knots. What are they going to do, fan the fire out or something? I don't get that part of it. He had them tied up in knots so they couldn't do anything, and they threw them in. Notice how mad the king was. Did you catch that? "Stoke up the fire seven times hotter than normal." Did you catch what happened to the guys that threw them into the furnace? They all died. That's how hot the fire was.

I remember watching *In Search Of* when I was a kid. Remember that show with Leonard Nimoy? *In Search Of*...I think that was the show. They had the fiery furnace and were in search of how these guys could survive that. They did this illustration showing that in furnaces like the Babylonians used, there would have been "cool spots" where they could have survived. Get over it! That's ridiculous! I was a kid and I knew that was a bunch of malarkey.

They threw them in. They had those robes. That's not going to catch fire because there's a "cool spot"? Why don't we build a house there...it's just ridiculous. That's the level to which we will go to deny what God says is true and try to explain it away. We don't want to say what God says is true sometimes.

When they throw them in, the king sees them walking around and he sees what seems to be the son of the gods, an angelic figure, a divine figure. It could have been the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, or maybe just an angel of the Lord. We aren't told definitely which one it is. You can make a case for either I think. But the king sees four people. He sees them walking around. The tight ropes are gone. They don't appear harmed. So he goes over to the edge and hollers to them to come out. They come out and amazingly enough, they still have their eyebrows. Not a single hair on their head was scorched. It's kind of amazing. That's the power of God.

I can't fathom having that kind of trust in God's power. When you think about it, you and I deny God's power and think we have to do things on our own quite often, don't we? We aren't talking about something as strong as trusting in God's power in the face of death. We are talking about trusting God's power in the face of life. Some of the little things we have to face as we go through life, we think we have to face them on our own. We think we don't need the Lord's strength or the Lord's help or the Lord's power, so we face things on our own. And maybe instead of asking God for help, we blame God when we are facing these difficulties. Instead of trusting in his power to help us through the difficulty of a sickness or a disease or facing chronic pain or difficulties in our life and our relationships, we get mad and say, "God, why would you let this happen to me?" We shake our fist at God and say, "God, you don't love me anymore!" Or at least we think it.

We don't always trust in his power. Maybe it's because as we face some of those lesser things, lesser than losing your life let's say, we don't focus as clearly on God. When these guys are confronted with life or death, their eyes immediately fly to God and they focus on God and God's power. And they trust it because they are focused on it.

If you and I are faced with death, maybe we too...I wouldn't want to wish this on any of us, but maybe at that point in time we fly to God and focus on God and say, "Lord, I need your help. I can't handle this." I think Satan's gotten smarter over the centuries and over the millenia. He doesn't threaten us with death. He threatens us with life.

As we go about our day-to-day life in the workplace, to get ahead in the workplace we say, "I need to get ahead in the workplace, so I'm not going to live the way God wants me to. I'm going to run down my coworkers so I look better in someone else's eyes. I'm going to gossip about them because it will make me feel better because they hurt my feelings." We end up doing all these things because we don't trust in God. We see ourselves and we love ourselves more than we love God. We do it time after time after time. We cave in in the face of life.

We don't always trust in God's power in the face of life because we don't focus on him. That's what is so amazing about our God. He knows that. He has seen us do it ever since the fall into sin. Yet God in his wisdom acted in such a way to meet our greatest needs even when we didn't want that need met. God in his wisdom came up with a plan where all of our sins would be paid for, all of the times when we've trusted in ourselves instead of looking to him, all the times that we loved ourselves more than we loved others and more than we loved him...God came up with a plan to take all that sin away. He sent himself into the world. The Son of God came, lived perfectly in our place, took all those sins to the cross and says to us, "I've given you my Holy Spirit so that you believe Jesus is your Savior so that all these sins are forgiven." This is his wisdom. This is his wisdom put into practice with his power to take away our sins.

That's why we're here. That's why we rejoice. That's why when we go forward we want to trust in his power more because we know we can trust in his wisdom as well. His wisdom and his power always act together for our eternal good, not our earthly happiness, our eternal good.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego also recognized God's wisdom because they said "God has the power to rescue us, but in his wisdom, if he chooses not to, if he lets that fire consume us, it doesn't matter king. He's still our God and we're going to trust him." On the one side, there's turning away from God and being in the threat of losing faith because you've denied God and sinned against him and you want to start rationalizing that sin and excusing that sin. On the other side, there's doing what God has called you to do and if it leads to death for those three, they thought "so be it. We'll be with the Lord and that wisdom is a lot better than anything we can come up with." Trusting in God's wisdom means even when we can't see how this is for our good, we simply trust that God in his wisdom is going to make it for our good.

We have a number of months now until Thanksgiving, right? We are in January. We have until November. If I give you a piece of paper and tell you every day to list another thing you're thankful for from the Lord, are you going to make it far enough down on that list so that you list what Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount today? "Blessed are you when people persecute you, insult you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." Are you going to get to that point where you are going to say, "Lord, thank you for all those people that attack me because I lived my faith in you. Thank you for all those people that made fun of me and mocked me and ridiculed me and called me all kinds of nasty names." I know on Thanksgiving day I never get that far.

It's not fun to be attacked because you are doing what is right before God. It's not fun to hear all those words that you weren't sure exactly what they meant, but you are pretty sure they aren't a compliment. But those things will happen as we live our faith. He tells us to expect it, but he says we are blessed because if it drives us closer to him, that's a good thing.

If we look to him for our strength and our power for living instead of ourselves, if we are attacked and we say, "Lord, you have to help me because no one else is," that's for our eternal good. So we trust in his wisdom that even the things that we don't like, the things that we don't want to endure, we trust in his wisdom. It's hard. It's not easy. I know the wisdom that I want God to act in, and he just seems to time after time choose not to operate on my time schedule. So then I need to just shut up and trust him. The more we do that, the more blessed we will be.

So trust in his strength, even when your eyes are telling you something different. Thankfully the Lord hasn't let someone come threatening us with a fiery furnace, but that doesn't mean that Satan isn't just as busy trying to chew at our backsides. So get closer to God and live in his grace.