



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 29, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

4th Sunday after Epiphany

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

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 37

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

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

The Savior's Sermon: Trust in God's Strength The Lord Delivers Out of Weakness

- (1) _____ do you trust in _____?
- (2) God is _____ than our _____ and _____
- (3) The Lord _____ in _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Some of the most popular movies in the last 10-20 years are those super heroes/Marvel movies that are blockbusters. Some of them make billions of dollars. There has been super hero after super hero. Now they are starting to get critique about some of their movies and super heroes for different reasons, but one of the reasons is that they started getting all these super heroes that have these amazing powers that make them seem like they have no weakness. Captain Marvel is one of the newer ones. She has all this strength and no one can defeat her. How exciting is it to watch someone who really doesn't have a weakness? With Dr. Strange and the Scarlett Witch, they have magic. When you have magic, you can always have a new magic thing to defeat the other magic. There is really no stopping what they can do. It kind of makes it less exciting when there is no weakness. It's hard to relate to.

Think about some of the other popular super heroes. Iron Man was one of the most popular. He had his big suit and all his powers, but one of his greatest weaknesses was his personality. He was prideful. He was a narcissist. That caused a lot of his downfall.

Also think about some of the historical super heroes. Think about the one that is probably the most popular—Superman. He had his kryptonite. It was a weakness he had against kryptonite that pretty much made him just a normal person.

Why is it important to have some weakness? If super heroes don't have a weakness, how do we relate to them? We all have weaknesses. We all have places where we fall short. Some pretend to be super heroes. Some pretend to not have any weaknesses, but how does that go? Not very well, right? We have to learn how to live with our weaknesses and how to trust and to deal with our life, especially when we are weak and when we are in some of the most difficult of times.

As we look at who God is and as He speaks to us in Daniel, we see that the Lord delivers out of weakness. Sometimes when people are in their lowest times, in the hardest situations, we see that's where God comes and rescues. We see what it was like for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I think these are some of the coolest names in the Bible. We see them exiled and in this foreign land. They are away from the temple and away from their security, and things only get worse.

Nebuchadnezzar sets up this large image of gold. They say it was 60 cubits tall by 6 cubits wide (which doesn't mean a lot). They say that is about 90 feet tall by 9 feet wide. He doesn't just set this up, he also sets up this huge fanfare. Before the section that we read, he explains what everyone is to do. He tells all the nations of every language, every person who he has brought to his country (it was pretty diverse because he conquered all these places and brought back the wise men from there—that's who Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel were—some of the wise men from Israel), "It doesn't matter who you are. When you hear the horn, the flute, the zither, the lyre, the harp, the pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship or you will immediately be thrown into a blazing fire."

You can picture it. We hear music all the time but can you imagine what the music of that sounded like? Blaring noise almost, but I think the point was it was something you couldn't avoid. It was something that everyone was going to hear and everyone was supposed to bow down and worship. I think Nebuchadnezzar is putting it out there and saying "*What do you trust in most?*" What do you trust when you are asked to worship? What do you trust in life? That's really what worship is. When we bow down in worship, when people of whatever religion they are, when they are bowing down they are showing who they trust, who they go to for times of difficulty, who they go and thank when things are good. So he has brought all these people from all different nations and languages and he is saying "Who do you trust? Do you trust in me and who I am, this great king and this great statue I have set up? Are you willing to trust your old gods, trust yourselves and disobey me? The consequence for disobeying me is that you will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." It's not just a simple question, but this question has consequences. They really have to show who they trust in and really mean it because if they say "We don't want to worship your god," there are consequences.

We see this is what happens to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. As they come to Nebuchadnezzar, who has heard about this thing that they have done—they refused to

worship—Nebuchadnezzar gives them a second chance. He comes and explains again what they were supposed to do and he gives them that second chance. ***“...if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able you to rescue you from my hand?”*** Nebuchadnezzar is really showing his pride and who he thinks is in control of everything.

But here Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego reply to him. ***“King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”*** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego really confess their faith here. They show where their trust is and where their hope is. They are unwilling to trust in anyone else. They really show that *God is greater than our highs and lows.*

What does that mean that God is greater than our highs and lows? When we are in good times, who is it easy to trust in? It is easy to pat ourselves on the back when things are good because “Look what I’ve done.” When we are in difficult times, when we are weak, when we don’t know the answer, sometimes it’s hard to look to and know who to trust in and where to turn, but we know that God is greater. This is what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego show. God is greater than whatever thing they are facing. They trust in God. They show their faith in this knowing that whatever they face, God can deliver them.

How do we show what we trust in? What are things that people put their trust in, in the good times and in the bad times? I think there are all sorts of things that we put our trust in. How do we show that? The time we spend on things. If it’s work and getting your 401(k) and your retirement to be a certain number and so big so you don’t have to worry. It’s easy to trust in our strength and our money and the things that we can see. It’s easy to trust in our health and say “I’m going to live so long and know that I don’t have to worry about much.” Maybe you put your trust in your family and your kids or your spouse and you put all your needs and hopes in them; for your spouse to fulfill your emotional needs and to help in any time and maybe by putting unrealistic expectations on them; or your children and putting all your energy into them thinking, “That’s my whole purpose.” Yes, it’s good to love your spouse. It’s good to pour into your children. But am I putting my hope and my future into them and not into the right places? We can pour into so much knowing that they are just people too. We might think “They’re going to provide for me” or “They’re my hope for the future,” but we don’t know what the future holds. It’s so easy for us to put our hope in so many different things; to trust in whatever else is out there. Then we have to ask if we are really trusting in God.

We can think of just about any sin we commit and what do we know? The foundation of that sin is a lack of trust. A lack of trust in God that He knows what is best for us or what He says is good and right. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, God had said "Don't bow down to other gods." Others might say it's not really a big deal. "I can do this. I can bow down and worship this god but still know our God is the great God and I can just blend in." But that's not trusting in God and not listening to what He says. There are so many things in life where we maybe try to blend in and say "God says this but you know everyone else lives together before marriage. We couldn't make it financially if we didn't do it this way." So we take what God says and we say "I don't trust that you can provide or that your way is best."

That's exactly what the devil did with Adam and Eve. He had them say and think that God doesn't know what is best for them, that God was keeping something from them. "When you eat of this" he said, "your eyes will be opened. You'll know good and evil and you'll be like God." ([Genesis 3](#)) The devil got them to not trust in God. When we lean on our strength and our wisdom, we see we often fall short.

When we are weak, when things are difficult, it's easy for us to trust in God. We have reached the lows. But what about when things are good or when we think we know best? That's why it's important to remember that God is greater than our highs and lows. He is greater than our enemies and our fears. Those things that we are worried about, we know God has them in control. But sometimes we don't want to give up. We don't want to give into God and let Him lead us.

This is exactly what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did. They confessed their faith. They said that their God CAN deliver them if they are thrown into the fire. They said "God can deliver us and He WILL deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if He doesn't, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." What is so interesting about that confession and that example of faith that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have? Yes, they share that God can deliver them, but notice what they say at the end. "Maybe He won't. We know He CAN deliver us, but does He promise that in this situation, in this fiery furnace He is going to do something special, that He is going to provide a miracle?" What they are saying is that *the Lord delivers in His ways*. "The Lord does promise to deliver us." That's what they said. They said "The Lord can protect us, but most of all He WILL deliver us from your hand."

What do you think they meant by that? Even if He doesn't deliver them, notice they say that He will still deliver them from his hand. To me I think that tells him that even if they do die, they are going to go to heaven. They will be with their Lord. They will be delivered from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, maybe not the way that they would want to, but according to His ways.

Isn't it interesting that we struggle with that. We struggle with being delivered in His ways. One of the biggest ways we struggle with that is trusting in God about the future. We really like to be in control. We really like to plan out and know how things are going to go. But rarely do they go as planned. That can cause great anxiety and great worry. It can cause us to fear and say "Does God know what He is doing? Is God really in control?" But we know that God is delivering in His way. He is leading us and guiding us, not in the way that we might want but in the way that He knows is best.

I think a thing that relates to this (looking at our highs and lows and being delivered in His ways) is to think about one of our lowest points. I think we, as Christians, sometimes struggle with repentance. We struggle with asking God for forgiveness. Why? It shows weakness. We struggle with asking God for forgiveness but especially when repenting to someone else and confessing our sins and trusting that "They are going to forgive me." God says this is the way. We confess our sins to each other. What is confession and repenting? It's saying "I have sinned. I have done this thing that I'm ashamed of." I think so often we are afraid to do that because we are afraid what the one person might think or say and we're afraid to show that weakness. We think we're like those super heroes that have no weakness. But we know that's not true.

Through repentance we see God's strength. We know that we are not saved because of our good works or who we are. We are saved by the work of Jesus. We see that Jesus came to live among us. He talks in the Beatitudes (at the end) about what He faced. We would face persecution just like He was persecuted. When we look at the plan of salvation, who would have imagined that God would send His Son and then He would die on a cross? That is not the way that we would plan salvation. This is the way that God does it. It's His ways. Then so foreign to us, he says "You can't save yourself. You have no part in it. You don't choose to believe." It's all Jesus. It's all grace. It's all faith, which is worked by the Holy Spirit. He delivers and saves in His ways.

As Paul writes, this is so foreign to us, so foreign to the human mind that wants to take responsibility and wants to say that we do something and "It's because of us that the good go to heaven. There must be something that sets us apart here because we're here on Sunday morning. We're sitting in the pews and not out there." We like to make something about us. But what God shows us is that it's all about Him. He saves us in His ways and shows us that we can trust in Him when we don't know what is ahead. We can trust in Him when we are at our weakest, when we've sinned and have fallen short. We can trust in Him in all ways.

We see for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that they were delivered. This great miracle, where they are in the fire and even the soldiers that put them in there died. But here they are, walking around, unharmed. Not just them. There is a fourth; one that looks like the Son of God.

We know that we are not alone as we walk through difficulties. We are not alone in this world. The Lord provides and guides us through our unknowns, through the times where we are overly proud and the times that we feel so lost. Most of all, we know that He will deliver us through all things. We know that death is a thing that is ahead for all of us but we don't have to worry. We don't have to fear. We know that the Lord delivers in His ways.

In the same way that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stepped out of that fire, we too will step out of this life into heaven. As Jesus says, "Don't fear what we face in this life." Don't fear your worries, your troubles, your difficulties, what persecution you may face because what? **"...great is your reward in heaven..."** Why?—because of Christ; because Jesus has saved you in His way. He delivers in our weakness. In our most difficult times and in our greatest times, the Lord is here with you always. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.