



Rooted

IN HIS WORD



April

VISION



Rooted In His Word: Vision

Isaiah 6:1-8 - Isaiah's Encounter with God: A Pattern for Worship

April 11, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

Today's lesson is about a vision that the prophet Isaiah had "in the year that King Uzziah died" which was 742 BC. The Kingdom of Israel divided in 930 BC: Israel to the North and Judah in the South. Isaiah prophesied from Jerusalem with a basic message to both Kingdoms: God's judgment is coming, but so is His comfort. The vision that Isaiah had happened early in his life and impacted the rest of his life in a dramatic way. The record of his vision gives us a description of what can happen to an individual who encounters Yahweh, the Great I Am. This description has become a pattern for worship as we will explore in this lesson.

It is very difficult for us to imagine this scene described by Isaiah. Who or what exactly did Isaiah see in his vision? Was it God the Father, a pre-incarnate Jesus, or some form of His glory on the throne?

In the original Hebrew text, what Isaiah saw is the word "Adonai" which is translated as "the Lord." In all of the original Hebrew Old Testament writings, whenever the subject is God the Father or Jehovah, the sages consistently wrote the 4 letters YHVH (Yood, Hey, Vav, Hey which can be pronounced "Yah-way" or Yehovah or Jehovah). In virtually every English translation of the Bible YHVH is translated as LORD in all caps. So, Isaiah refrained from saying that he saw YHVH. Perhaps he wrote the word Adonai because he knew very well Exodus 33:20 in which God Himself says, *"you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* Some have then speculated that Isaiah saw a pre-incarnate Jesus, who is God, on the throne. But, since it was a spiritual vision and not something in the physical, we can suffice it to say that Isaiah had a heavenly encounter with our one and only true God.

(For further research see John 12:37-41 where John speaks of Jesus and makes reference to Isaiah's vision and what he saw. John wrote in 12:41 that Isaiah "saw His glory and spoke about Him," meaning Jesus. The NIV and a few others actually state that Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory.")

MAIN GOAL: To encounter God in worship is the most important thing we do as believers, for out of that will come our calling by God to serve Him in this world.

TODAY'S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: The worship of God should begin with praise.

TRUTH #2: In the presence of God's perfect holiness, our sinfulness becomes acutely apparent.

TRUTH #3: What we confess to Him, God will forgive.

TRUTH #4: Worship demands the response of following God's call to share the gospel.

I. INTRODUCTION

How would you define worship?

You may hear a variety of answers which include words like "praise", "singing", or "praying". The keyword to listen for is "RESPONSE."

Worship is our RESPONSE to God for who He is and what He has done in Creation and for sending His Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to be our Savior.

Franklin Seger in his book *Christian Worship* writes: "Worship is an end in itself; it is not a means to something else. When we try to worship for the sake of certain benefits that may be received, the act ceases to be worship; for then it attempts to use God as a means to something else. We worship God purely for the sake of worshipping God."

"To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." - William Temple (1881 – 1944)

II. GET FOCUSED

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

TRUTH #1: THE WORSHIP OF GOD SHOULD BEGIN WITH PRAISE.

Psalm 100 says to "come before him with joyful songs...Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise."

According to verses 2, 3, and 6 of our passage what are seraphim, and what do they do?

The seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy." What does the word "holy" mean?

The Hebrew word for holy is "kadosh" and it means "set apart". God is absolutely "set apart" from humans in His perfection. But yet, in this sinful world, we are commanded by God to be set apart from the world.

Read Leviticus 20:26 and 1 Peter 1:15-16

Leviticus 20:26 *"You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."*

1 Peter 1:15-16 *"but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

Is it significant that in verse 3 the seraphim repeat the word Holy 3 times?

One of the examples of similarity between Hebrew, Greek, and English is the use of repeated words for emphasis. In the Greek N.T., we see "verily, verily I say unto you.." In English, Winston Churchill said, "Never, never, never give up." But there are only a very few instances in the whole Bible where we see a word repeated 3 times for emphasis like what we see in verse 3. Think of the 3 repetitions as great, greater, and greatest! Our God is the Holiest that can be.

Do we begin worship with praise so that God's presence will come to us, or do we praise Him because we have entered into His presence?

It is important to note that in our worship, we are just like Isaiah who entered into God's holy presence which was already there before Isaiah arrived. When we come together to worship and recognize that we are in the presence of our 3-times-holy God, our response is genuine praise that comes forth from us.

We have all heard the phrase “God inhabits the praises of His people” (Derived from Psalm 22:3 which says that God is enthroned upon or dwells in the praises of His people Israel). We should never think of this in a way that would imply that God’s presence is somehow conjured up by anything we initiate. God is not waiting somewhere else for our worship service to start before He decides to join us. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Yes, we can find instances where a greater manifestation of the glory of God appeared when praises were being offered such as the dedication of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 5. But a more accurate phrase for followers of Christ to say would be “People who are inhabited by God will praise Him!”

In our worship today, we usually start with an upbeat song of praise. This song selection is to lead us into the praise of God because our worship starts with praise. This isn’t an attention-getting-song, it is intentional to lead us into the presence of God.

How does this understanding of praise challenge your corporate worship experience? How does it help you enter into the presence of God?

YOUR VIEWPOINT

TRUTH #2: IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD’S PERFECT HOLINESS, OUR SINFULNESS BECOMES ACUTELY APPARENT.

Read Isaiah 6:5

“And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Have you ever attended a party or an event that you thought was to be casual attire, only to walk in and discover everyone dressed up? How did that make you feel?

Multiply the way you felt by 1,000 and you might come close to what Isaiah felt in his vision: In the presence of God’s holiness, Isaiah was overwhelmed by his utter sinfulness. His own righteousness was suddenly like filthy rags.

Why is Isaiah's response to his self-realization, I am a "man of unclean lips"?

"Unclean lips" is an idiomatic way of describing sinfulness much the same way that Moses declared his unworthiness to speak to Pharaoh because he had "uncircumcised lips". The scriptures confirm the truth that what is in our hearts is revealed by what comes forth from our lips.

It appears that Isaiah felt unworthy to worship such a holy God. Has the realization of your sin ever made you feel like you should run from His presence instead of run into His presence?

Read Proverbs 18:7 and Matthew 15:18

Proverbs 18:7 *"A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul."*

Matthew 15:18 *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man."*

In our passage, Isaiah immediately knows that he is not unique in his condition. He has an immediate realization that all of humanity is no better off than he--completely tarnished and unclean before the one and only Holy God of the Universe.

Have you been in a worship experience when you became aware of your sinfulness? How did you respond? How should we respond?

TRUTH #3: WHAT WE CONFESS TO HIM, GOD WILL FORGIVE.

Read Isaiah 6:6-7

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

What happened immediately after Isaiah confessed that he had unclean lips?

How many times have you heard “and forgive us our many sins” tacked onto the end of a prayer without much thought behind identifying “our many sins?” Do not miss the simple but profound lesson given in this passage: Isaiah confessed that he and everybody he knew had unclean lips. So, that is what the seraphim immediately and specifically addressed. What does this teach us about how we should make our confessions to God?

One of the seraphim took a coal from the altar. Why do you think there is an altar before the throne of God in Isaiah’s vision?

Some thoughts about this portion of the vision are:

- The purpose of an altar is for sacrifice.
- The altar allowed the hot coal to be taken to Isaiah’s lips to purge his iniquity.
- The altar can represent the altar of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Jesus) which was to come about 750 years after Isaiah. Or it may be the altar of incense in the Temple representing the sweet-smelling prayers of God’s people who would cry out to Him.
- The burning coal is the Gospel of Jesus Christ by whose blood we are cleansed. Jeremiah 23:29 says, “Is not my word like a fire?”
- The seraph is the messenger of God which is analogous to those who take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who need it applied to their unclean hearts.

What sacrifice has been made for us to enter into God’s presence?

How does Jesus forgive your sin?

TRUTH #4: WORSHIP DEMANDS THE RESPONSE OF FOLLOWING GOD’S CALL TO SHARE THE GOSPEL.

Read Isaiah 6:8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Up to this point in Isaiah's vision, he had only heard two things: the praises of the seraphim, and the message from the seraph of what the burning coal had done to his sin. After his cleansing, Isaiah is able to hear a question from the Lord that appears as if Isaiah has just overheard it being asked to others unidentified.

To whom do you think the Lord is speaking when he asks, "And who will go for us?"

The Lord could have been speaking to the seraphim of which we know there had to be at least two. This could also be a reference to the triune nature of the Godhead, the Three-in-One such as in Genesis 1:26: *"Let us make man in our image."*

But without a doubt, the question was intended for the spiritual ears of Isaiah and all who have spiritual ears to hear. Isaiah jumped at the chance to say, "Here am I, send me!"

How have you heard this call to go in your life? How have you responded?

The actual response from Isaiah to the Lord was the Hebrew word "Hineni" which means, "Here am I." But it is more than just an acknowledgment of physical presence. It means, "I am here, at your service!"

Can you think of any other people in the Bible who answered God's call in this way?

- It's the same response Abraham gave to God when He called to him in Gen.22:1 and asked him to sacrifice his only son Isaac.
- It's the same response that Moses gave when God called to him from the burning bush.
- It's the same response young Samuel answered to God the third time He called his name. He said, "Hineni, I'm listening!"

III. CONCLUSION

We see here, in Isaiah 6, the pattern of worship that we use even today. We come into His presence with praise, are convicted of sin because of his holiness, find forgiveness in Him, and respond to His calling to share this good news with others.

How will this impact the way you worship Him corporately and privately?

IV. PRAYER

You don't have to wait until a vision comes upon you to go through the steps that are illustrated by Isaiah's experience. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart."

You can have a genuine encounter with the Holy One if you will come to Him in faith and say to Him: "Heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner, a person of "unclean lips", and I ask you to purge me and make me clean by the sacrificial blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. I make myself available to you as your servant to go where you want me to go and say and do the things you want me to say and do. I surrender my will to You! In Jesus' name, I pray, amen!"

V. EXTRA TIME

Using the definition of "HOLY" to mean "SET APART," give more examples of what that would look like in the life of a Believer?

Ask one or two people to share their experience of when they encountered God, realized their sinfulness, confessed that they were a sinner and had their sins forgiven by the blood of Jesus, and surrendered their life to be a servant of the LORD.

VI. MEMORY VERSE

Ezekiel 37: 27

Rooted In His Word: Vision

Ezekiel 37:1-14: The Valley of Dry Bones – God’s Plan for His People Israel

April 18, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

Today’s lesson is about a vision that the prophet Ezekiel had in or close to the year 600 BC, soon after the start of the 605 BC, 70-year captivity known as the Babylonian Exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Ezekiel witnessed his people, the children of Israel, pushed to the brink of extinction. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already fallen to the Assyrians over 100 years earlier. But Ezekiel, the prophet of God, was given a vision about the restoration of all of Israel in a time when it seemed impossible that Judah AND all of the scattered tribes of Israel, could ever become one united Kingdom of God again.

MAIN GOAL: God is at work in the world to raise His people from death and give them abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

TODAY’S TRUTHS:

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #1: The wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:23).

PROPHETIC TRUTH #1: The disobedience of the children of Israel had left them scattered and as lifeless as dry bones, but God is not finished with His chosen ones.

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #2: The Lord calls upon the followers of Christ to tell those who are “dead” that He can give them new life!

PROPHETIC TRUTH #2: Ezekiel, the prophet of Israel, was instructed by God to prophesy to the dry bones that God was going to bring Israel back to new life and be their God!

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #3: When lost people repent and invite Jesus into their hearts, the Holy Spirit “breathes on them” and does the miraculous work of bringing them to life after being spiritually dead.

PROPHETIC TRUTH #3: God will raise up a mighty army to prepare for His return.

TRUTH #4: There is a bodily resurrection after death awaiting those who belong to God.

I. INTRODUCTION

Think of something in your yard or garden that died.

Picture it and remember how you felt when it died no matter what you did to try and save it.

Now imagine walking outside and before your very eyes, it starts coming back to life like a high-speed video! The color returns, the stem stands up, and the leaves spread out. What a miracle!

And then wake up, it was a dream.

Now imagine a valley of thousands of dried human skeletal bones, rib cages, and skulls.

Suddenly they all begin to move and join themselves back together!

Then organs, muscles, and flesh begin to grow on the skeletons, but they still appear to have no life in them.

Then a strong wind comes and breathes life back into the bodies and they all stand up--and then you wake up!

This was the vision that Ezekiel was given by God as a prophecy about the future of the children of Israel who were divided, scattered, and powerless as a once-great nation.

This story has mostly been used as an **allegory** (allegory defined: a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one) to teach about the new life that Jesus can give to a lost sinner. Many sermons have been preached by pastors using this picture of dry bones coming to life to depict what God can do for "dried up" churches and "dried up" people. That illustration can certainly be applied in a powerful, vivid way. But let's look at both the **Allegorical Truths** AND the actual **Prophetic Truths** of what Ezekiel's vision means for those who are part of the New Covenant in Christ AND for the people called the children of Israel of the Bible. Because, brothers and sisters, we are getting ever nearer to when this 2600-year-old prophecy may reach its total fulfillment. This lesson today is about our past, present, and our future!

II. GET FOCUSED

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #1: THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH (ROM. 3:23).

Read Ezekiel 37:1-3

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ²And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

What Ezekiel was shown in his vision can represent the spiritual state of all of humanity who have rejected God.

Read Eph. 2:1, Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:13, I Tim. 5:6

Ephesians 2:1 And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins...

Ephesians 2:5 ...we were **dead** in trespasses...

Colossians 2:13 ...you, who were **dead** in your trespasses...

I Timothy 5:6 ...but she who is self-indulgent is **dead** even while she lives.

In these 4 verses, what is the description of someone who is living in the bondage of sin?

In verse 3 of our passage, God asks Ezekiel "Can these bones live again?"

If the bones represent people who are lost, do not know Jesus, and are slaves to sin, how would you answer this question?

If the bones represent believers, church members, or even church leaders whose lives have become dry and lifeless from bad circumstances, failures, emotional or mental stress, attacks from the enemy, or sin in their lives, how would you answer this question?

God did not ask Ezekiel if the bones could live again because He did not know the answer! He asked this question in order to prompt Ezekiel's heart to contemplate a miracle that only God could do.

Sometimes we need God to ask us:

- Do you really believe your lost neighbor, who is dead in his sins and openly rejects God, can be saved?
- Can the dry and lifeless spiritual bones of your father-in-law, niece or nephew come alive?
- Can a church that is on the verge of closing its doors come back to life?

Has there been a time in your life when you realized you were dead and lifeless without God? Tell us about that.

PROPHETIC TRUTH #1: THE DISOBEDIENCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAD LEFT THEM SCATTERED AND AS LIFELESS AS DRY BONES, BUT GOD IS NOT FINISHED WITH HIS CHOSEN ONES.

God showed Ezekiel what His people Israel looked like from His perspective: scattered, lifeless, and dry. The Northern Kingdom was gone, and the Southern Kingdom was in captivity in Babylon. By any human reasoning, the condition of the children of Israel appeared absolutely beyond hope for any restoration. Ezekiel must have felt great sorrow.

But God had not given up His plans for His people Israel.

Read Jeremiah 29:10-11

"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah was a contemporary of Ezekiel, and he was also prophesying to Israel in exile. Both of their prophecies came true when Israel came back from Babylon and rebuilt the 2nd Temple. But the 2nd Temple was destroyed in 70 AD and the Children of Israel scattered once more.

Do you think Jeremiah's prophecy of a hope and a future for Israel along with Ezekiel's prophecy will have a fulfillment in the future that we have yet to see?

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #2: THE LORD CALLS UPON THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST TO TELL THOSE WHO ARE "DEAD" THAT HE CAN GIVE THEM NEW LIFE!

Read Ezekiel 37:4-6

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

Preaching to dead people! That's exactly the way the Bible describes how God used the early apostles in spreading the Gospel!

Read Matthew 28:19 and Romans 10:14-15

Matthew 28:19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*

Romans 10:14-15 *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

In this passage, who is the one to go and who is the preacher?

1 Peter 3:15 says, *"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."*

Do you feel like you are at the point, in your faith, where you are ready to give a reason for your hope? Why or why not?

How do you prepare yourself to be ready in season and out?

PROPHETIC TRUTH #2: EZEKIEL, THE PROPHET OF ISRAEL, WAS INSTRUCTED BY GOD TO PROPHECY TO THE DRY BONES THAT GOD WAS GOING TO BRING ISRAEL BACK TO NEW LIFE AND BE THEIR GOD!

This prophecy came true about 70 years after the vision of dry bones. The Jews came out of their captivity in 537 BC and began rebuilding the Temple. But the divided Kingdom never reunited and in 70 AD the 2nd Temple was destroyed, and Rome dispersed the Jews. There is still a fulfillment of this prophecy yet to come!

ALLEGORICAL TRUTH #3: WHEN LOST PEOPLE REPENT AND INVITE JESUS INTO THEIR HEARTS, THE HOLY SPIRIT "BREATHES ON THEM" AND DOES THE MIRACULOUS WORK OF BRINGING THEM TO LIFE AFTER BEING SPIRITUALLY DEAD.

Read Ezekiel 37:7-10

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

This is what the transforming power of the Holy Spirit can do in the life of one who was "dead in trespasses and sins."

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

According to this verse, how would you describe the difference that Jesus has made in your life?

PROPHETIC TRUTH #3: GOD WILL RAISE UP A MIGHTY ARMY TO PREPARE FOR HIS RETURN.

This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled, however, many believe the 2nd Coming of Christ is imminent, the stage is being set for the final battle of the ages, and that we are living in the last days.

At this point, the Allegorical and the Prophetic merge together for our final truth.

TRUTH #4: THERE IS A BODILY RESURRECTION AFTER DEATH AWAITING THOSE WHO BELONG TO GOD.

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14

Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

The story of the Valley of Dry Bones has as its conclusion a standing army, clothed and armed for battle, brought back to life from utter death. This army did not raise itself up. The lesson is that only God can perform the work of bringing dead people back to life.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

1 Thess. 4:16 *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

1 Cor. 15:51-52 *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*

What do these verses say will happen in the future when Jesus comes again?

For those sinners who repent and experience the new life that Jesus can give them, there is more to look forward to after death. We call it "Our heavenly home," "Beyond the Jordan," "Beulah Land," or just "Heaven" to name a few terms. But much more than being in a place, it is being in the very presence of our Lord and Savior that we long for. 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, *"Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."*

III. CONCLUSION

God is at work in the world to raise His people from death and give them abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

John 5:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."

As we have seen in this lesson, there is an obvious, yet powerful allegory about new life in Christ from Ezekiel's vision. But Ezekiel's vision was also a real prophecy about the future of Israel which is still in the process of reaching its complete fulfillment. Since Ezekiel's vision, millions of saints have died through the centuries and their bones are lying in graves or under the sea (or perhaps disconnected and scattered) all over the world. Romans 8:11 says, *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."*

"Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people come alive!"
--Pastor Mike Turner

How have the truths from today impacted your vision of who we are and who we will be?

IV. PRAYER

Guide the class in praying prayers of thanksgiving for the eternal life we have in Christ Jesus. Pray for the lost who are "dead in their trespasses and sins" and need to come to Christ. Perhaps the class can call out first names or those who are lost and will not experience their bodily resurrection without the transforming and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Galatians 2:20 says, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

V. MEMORY VERSE

Daniel 3:29

Rooted In His Word: Vision

Daniel 3:8-30: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

April 25, 2021

FOR THE LEADER

This lesson is the familiar story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the “fiery furnace.” The main truth for the lesson today is: you should have the courage to stand up for your faith in God no matter what the cost knowing He is always present with us. The lesson is also about how God will be with you through the trials we face. Today, people who live their lives according to the Word of God can be looked upon as religious fanatics, antiquated, ignorant, or even undesirable for society. This Bible story is very pertinent for us today. Let’s encourage our members to understand that discipleship is costly and then live courageously in faith.

MAIN GOAL: To realize you should have the courage to stand up for your faith in God no matter what the cost knowing He is always present with us.

TODAY’S TRUTHS:

TRUTH #1: God calls some of His own for special assignments in the public arena. That calling may involve persecution from the enemies of God.

TRUTH #2: A believer who would rather die than to deny his faith in God is one who is totally surrendered to God.

TRUTH #3: The LORD is the deliverer for those who belong to Him, and He will be with them in the fires of tribulation.

TRUTH #4: When your faith is tested and you do not falter, God will be glorified, His kingdom will grow, and you will be rewarded.

I. INTRODUCTION

Think of a situation in which a Christian had to make a choice between obeying the government or obeying God.

What are some possible consequences for choosing to obey God rather than man?

Here are some examples:

1. Last year during the movement restrictions caused by Covid-19, Mark Baumgartner's Christian organization "A Moment of Hope" was on-site at Planned Parenthood in Columbia with 5 people praying and standing 30 feet apart from each other. The city police arrived and made them leave under threat of "custodial arrest." Because of their faithfulness and the prayers of others, they were permitted to return.
2. **"Kentucky clerk ordered to jail for refusing to issue gay marriage license"** Sept. 03, 2015 - A Kentucky clerk was sent to jail Thursday after a judge found her in contempt of court for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses to gay couples. Kim Davis, a clerk in Rowan County, was found in contempt of court on Thursday morning by Judge David Bunning.
3. **"Oregon orders Christian bakery owners to pay \$135,000 fine"** July 4, 2015 - Oregon's labor commissioner has ordered the owners of a Portland-area bakery to pay \$135,000 in damages to a lesbian couple for whom they declined to bake a wedding cake. Aaron and Melissa Klein are one of several Christian business owners across the country facing state-ordered retribution for refusing to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies.

BACKGROUND FOR THE TEXT

This narrative takes place during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon (605-562 BC) during the early stage of the "Babylonian captivity" of the Jewish Southern Kingdom called Judah. A people group called Chaldeans made up an influential sector of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a Chaldean. They were considered the highest educated and were very knowledgeable in astronomy and astrology. The Magi that came from the East were possibly from these people as was Abraham who was from Ur of the Chaldeans.

II. GET FOCUSED

Read Daniel 3:8-12

Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! ¹⁰Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹²But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."*

**(The Hebrew word for "Chaldeans" is translated as "astrologers" in the NIV and several other versions.)*

TRUTH #1: GOD CALLS SOME OF HIS OWN FOR SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA. THAT CALLING MAY INVOLVE PERSECUTION FROM THE ENEMIES OF GOD.

The Jews were taken captive in 586 BC by the Babylonians. Among the captives were four well-known Hebrew young men: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. As slaves, they were given Babylonian names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But they were rewarded by God for their faithfulness in obedience to the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible), and He blessed them with “great knowledge and understanding” (see Daniel 1:3-18). Nebuchadnezzar placed all four of these Jews in positions of prominence in his kingdom. In our lesson, certain Chaldeans became jealous of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and they sought to use the king’s decree to worship a golden image as a weapon to have them killed. Refusal to obey the king would result in death, so they betrayed the three of them to the king.

Why couldn’t the three men have just pretended to worship the image so as not to break the law of the land?

Have you ever been in a situation where you went along with the crowd instead of standing up for God?

For those who claim the name of Jesus Christ and stand upon God’s laws in His Word, you will be hated by God’s enemy the Devil. Satan and his minions will use every scheme possible to destroy the Church and our witness for the Lord. As our nation becomes more godless, with more legislation that oppose Christian values, we may someday find ourselves in the same shoes as our three Jewish friends.

YOUR VIEWPOINT

Read Daniel 3:13-18

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, 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 to rescue you from my hand?” ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸But 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.”

TRUTH #2: A BELIEVER WHO WOULD RATHER DIE THAN TO DENY HIS FAITH IN GOD IS ONE WHO IS TOTALLY SURRENDERED TO GOD.

Notice that the three men answered the king collectively. The Bible does not name a spokesman for the group. We can only assume that they were steadfast of one heart and mind. And notice also that they did not need any time to think about their response, it was instantaneous and direct. Their answer gave absolute confidence in the reality of their God, Yahweh, to deliver them. But if God chose not to deliver them, they knew that to worship the gods of this world was something they could not do. Their faith in God was the very core of their existence and compromising that was not even an option for them.

Do you think that you would be so quick and confident in your response if you were placed in a position to compromise with the world and live or stand upon the Word of God and die?

What can we do to encourage each other to be bold and uncompromising about our faith in God?

In the day of trouble, many Christians may be tempted to succumb to the adage, "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day." But our discipleship has demanded us to have already died to self by taking up our cross to follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24-26). Do we really want to be like Peter when he denied knowing Jesus? Peter's denial became the greatest regret of his life even though he was forgiven by Christ. Cassie Burnall, a student at Columbine High School, could not deny that she believed in Jesus when an evil young man with a gun asked her if she believed in Jesus. She paid for her answer with her life but gained a greater reward in Heaven (Philippians 1:21)!

Read Daniel 3:19-26

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²²The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." ²⁵He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." ²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

TRUTH #3: THE LORD IS THE DELIVERER FOR THOSE WHO BELONG TO HIM, AND HE WILL BE WITH THEM IN THE FIRES OF TRIBULATION.

King Nebuchadnezzar couldn't believe his eyes. The obvious lesson here is that God is the Deliverer of those who put their trust in Him. He may not always deliver us from the hand of evil men who can kill the body, but He promises to go with us through the fire.

What was the first and only thing that was consumed by the flames, and what significance does that hold for us?

This is a powerful example of God's complete love for His own. It was not enough for God to spare their flesh, clothing, and hair from destruction. He removed the very things that prevented them from lifting their hands in praise, touching each other in fellowship, and perhaps even dancing in their joy.

Who was the fourth man in the fiery furnace?

The translators of the Hebrew phrase in verse 25, "Da-meh labar elahin" are not all in agreement. Out of 27 English translations, this Hebrew phrase has been translated:

- 15 "the fourth looks like a son of the gods."
- 7 "the fourth looks like the Son of God."
- 4 "the fourth looks like a god,"
- 1 "the fourth looks like an angel."

Suffice it to say that the presence of the God who delivered the three men was manifested among them in the fire. The only person recorded who described what the fourth man looked like was Nebuchadnezzar who did not know our God, so how can he be the one to accurately state who he saw? But even his words let us know that there was a fourth man in the fire whose appearance was definitely not that of a normal mortal. There is a great argument to be made for the belief that this 4th man was a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus existed with God in the beginning (John 1:1). There are other Old Testament accounts of heavenly beings that appear to have the authority of Jesus (i.e. The Man/Angel with whom Jacob wrestled. Gen. 22:22-32).

Name another Biblical event in which something that should have burned up in a fire was not consumed? (see Exodus 3:1-3)

What does fire reveal to us about the nature of God?

Jeremiah 23:29 says, "Is not my word like fire?" Isaiah 4:4 says that God will cleanse Jerusalem "by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire." In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus, said "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." God's nature can be compared to a fire that consumes everything except that which is pure, holy, and righteous.

The God who created everything transcends His creation. He is so holy and set apart from us that he can override the very laws of physics and nature that He established. Consider this: what seems to be a miraculous event from our point of view is a normal occurrence for the Father. God doesn't perform miracles for His own benefit or to keep in practice! But He does sometimes use supernatural signs, wonders, and special revelations in the process of our becoming spiritual beings. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again—not physically, but spiritually!" (John 3:3)

Read Daniel 3:27-30

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. ²⁸Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

TRUTH #4: WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED AND YOU DO NOT FALTER, GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED, HIS KINGDOM WILL GROW, AND YOU WILL BE REWARDED.

Can you think of a time when your faith was tested, and you couldn't see how things would turn out, yet you remained faithful and experienced God's deliverance?

Because of the faith and obedience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God showed up in a powerful way. The king who did not know our God had his eyes opened and reversed his command to worship the golden idol. Incredibly, he commanded that the God of the Jews be honored! In addition, he promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the positions they held in Babylon. This single event happened early in the Babylonian Exile and could very well have contributed to the favor toward the Jews under King Cyrus who ended the captivity and allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.

III. CONCLUSION

We are living in challenging days in which modern-day disciples of Jesus Christ are being faced with crucial decisions between following Biblical convictions or the ways of this world which could compromise those convictions. It is extremely important for you to know what you believe and to define your convictions.

What is the difference between a preference and a conviction?

People do not die for their preferences, but they will stand upon their convictions with their lives. For example, many people would prefer to live in a world where they have civil liberties and constitutional rights. But fewer people will have convictions about living in a free democracy for themselves and their children's future and will defend those liberties with their lives. Many people would prefer for abortions not to happen, but fewer hold to a conviction that abortion is murder and must not happen.

Can you think of a specific time in your life when you were forced to decide if a belief you had was a preference or conviction? Tell us how you processed that decision?

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, pray that you will be found faithful to God if you ever have to decide between obedience to God or to man. Deut. 31:6: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

YOUR VIEWPOINT

IV. EXTRA TIME

In Daniel chapter one we see the four Jewish friends, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego together. But in our lesson, Daniel is absent from the charges brought by the Chaldeans. This can bring about interesting discussion.

Where was Daniel during this episode of the fiery furnace?

The Bible does not give us the answer to this detail. It is speculated that perhaps Daniel was in a different location of Babylon, or that he was in a higher position than the three others and therefore immune to the decree. Perhaps those who brought the charges against the three men had reasons not to bring a charge against Daniel at that time.

Daniel's trial in the lion's den came years later under a different king. A similar question could be asked about the whereabouts of the three men when Daniel was put in the lion's den for defying King Darius' decree not to pray to the God of Israel. Again, it is only speculated that the three men were not targeted or perhaps were not alive by the time of King Darius. All we know is that all four of these men were highly favored by God and used greatly by God because of their uncompromising faith.

V. MEMORY VERSE

Daniel 3:29

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

