

**Kingdom Clarity – Daniel 3**  
**Argyle – 11/13/16 – 52 Key Bible Stories**

**Introduction to Scripture**

What a week we have had! A tumultuous election season ended with a tumultuous election night. Last Sunday we all knew we would have a new President today, but I don't think many of us would have anticipated how this week has played out. As Christians, how do we understand what is going on in our country and how to respond in ways that are guided by Scripture? Could this morning's Scripture passage about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have any insight for us?

And does this passage have any insight for us today as we observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church? Last Sunday and today have been set aside this year to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. Here is a short video about the IDOP for the Persecuted Church. (Show IDOP video) There is an insert in your bulletin today with information about two countries where Christians are persecuted. I choose Turkey and Djibouti for us to focus on because they have been of special interest to us recently. On October 7, Evangelical Presbyterian Church missionaries, Andrew and Norine Brunson were arrested in Turkey. Norine was released, but Andrew has been in prison ever since. Three months ago most of us didn't even know where Djibouti was, but thanks to Dan it is on our radar. Dan spoke here in September and will be leaving

in three weeks as a missionary to Djibouti. It is important that we understand the persecution that is happening in places like Turkey and Djibouti and many other places around the world. Perhaps the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will give us some insight.

Last week in our study of Ezekiel we talked about how the nation of Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar at the Babylonians. Many of the Israelites were taken back to Babylon to live in exile. Among them were three gifted, young men named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were contemporaries of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar recognized their leadership potential and selected them for a special leadership training program. Even though they were Jewish exiles, there were given leadership responsibilities in the Babylonian government.

One day, however, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ran into trouble that put their lives in jeopardy. Let me set the stage for what happened. (Describe 3:1-14 - command to worship the statue of gold, the tattletales, Nebuchadnezzar's hissy fit & taunt). (Read 3:14-30)

### **The Clash of Two Kingdoms**

The first thing I want you to notice in this event is the clash of two kingdoms. This isn't just a disagreement over religion. It is a battle between two kingdoms - the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar thought he had the power to demand that everybody worship his gold statue. He did have a lot of power, but his power was limited. What he learned through this

incident was that there was a King, capital “K”, who was greater than him. I like Ernie Johnson put it, Johnson, who is an NBA commentator on the TNT Network, was commenting on this week’s election. Here is what he said.

(<http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/real-time/NBA-announcer-Ernie-Johnson-offers-the-most-poignant-take-on-the-election-yet.html>)

“I never know from one election to the next who is going to be in the Oval Office, but I always know who is on the throne. And I am on this earth because God created me and that is who I answer to.”

Elections are important. When I turned 21, which was the legal voting age at that time, I hitched hike home from college to vote for the first time. The first presidential election I voted in was 1976 when Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford. I have voted in every presidential election since then, as well as all of the mid-term elections and most of the local elections and party primaries. I believe in the importance of elections. Yet, it is important to remember that we didn’t elect the King on Tuesday. He was already on the throne and he always will be.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king, with a small “k”, but he forgot that. So the capital “K” King sent three of his servants to remind Nebuchadnezzar of who he was and who he wasn’t. This was a clash of two kingdoms. All of human history is ultimately a clash between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. That clash has accelerated with the coming of Jesus. When he began his ministry

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

It is important for us to remember that although we live in this world, we belong to the kingdom of God. Every day we have opportunities to show what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

A huge lesson we learn from this incident is the cost of discipleship. I have taken that phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book by that same title. Bonhoeffer not only wrote about the cost of discipleship, but he lived it out. Bonhoeffer was killed for his faith in a Nazi concentration camp shortly before the end of the war.

I don’t think I’ve ever heard a more powerful statement of faith than the words of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to Nebuchadnezzar when he threatened them with death in the furnace. “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.” (Daniel 3:16-18)

These three believed that God would save them from the fiery furnace, but, even if for some reason God didn’t save them, they were going to be obedient to God. The first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

They were willing to trust God's wisdom on this. Maybe he would have a reason why it would be better for them to die. That was "above their pay scale" as we say. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego focused on simple obedience.

I appreciated the insight of Ronald Wallace into these three men's extraordinary courage. He wrote, "Their answer, under such a fierce and determined threat, took superb courage, and was given with extraordinary dignity. It illustrates again how faithful and loyal behavior, sustained in a series of quiet decisions on less important matters, can come to glorious fruit in a spectacularly courageous witness to God in the hour of severe and open trial." Our first expression of faith is not usually something dramatic like this. We work up to such a courageous act by the little acts of faith we engage in every day. Wallace's comment reminded me of Daniel 1 where Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel refused to defile themselves by eating the royal food and wine. It was a little thing, but they were unwilling to compromise. It was little daily obediences like this that prepared them for the confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar.

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it." Denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Jesus is done one day at a time, one decision at a time, one act of obedience at a time. There is no doubt that this will be costly. Discipleship is not for the faint of heart.

## **The Closeness of God in Trouble**

One last thing I would like to point out is the closeness of God in trouble.

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused the second chance Nebuchadnezzar's offered them, he went ballistic. He ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal and he commanded his strongest soldiers to bind up the three men and throw them into the fire. In doing so some of the soldiers were killed by the intensity of the fire.

To his amazement, when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire he saw not three, but four men, unbound, unharmed and walking around in the fire. The fourth Nebuchadnezzar said looked like a "son of the gods." Who was that fourth man who came alongside of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in their time of need? It may have been an angel. It may have been a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. One way or another, God was close to his servants. The psalmist described God as "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Persecuted Christians often bear witness to the sense of God's presence in their suffering.

### **Conclusion**

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is a helpful one in gaining perspective on the events of our days. Whether you are excited or disappointed by the outcome of Tuesday's election, don't forget that we didn't elect a king on Tuesday, just a president. The King is still on the throne and nothing will keep

him from accomplishing his purposes. We need to pray for the President and worship the king.

Much of the turmoil we experience is because we are caught in a clash between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. It is important for us to recognize this spiritual battle that is going on to make sure we align ourselves with God's kingdom.

There is a cost to be paid for being a disciple of Jesus Christ. He made that clear at the outset. Our persecuted brothers and sisters are paying a much higher cost than we are, but if we are faithful to Jesus, we will pay a cost.

But as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego discovered, God is close to his servants, especially when they are suffering. An important part of our praying for the persecuted church is that they would experience that.