

Fight The Good Fight Of Faith

#6. When Government Becomes God

2.21.21

Daniel 3:8-18 NIV At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced 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.’ ¹³Furious 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.’

Central Truth: “Caesar often competes with God for our allegiance. Under ideal conditions, the responsibility of the state is to protect its citizens and to enact laws that will enable them to flourish. But the state often overreaches with laws that conflict with individual freedoms. As a nation drifts from God, pressure builds as the state encroaches on religious liberty and plays the role of God.”¹

I. Learning from our history

- A. We have two responsibilities that we must be careful to keep in proper alignment: our responsibility to God, and our responsibility to the state.

- B. “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God, the things that are God’s.” Jesus (Matthew 22:21)

- C. A brief history:
 - 1. Rome: Who is Lord?

¹ Erwin Lutzer; *The Church in Babylon: Heeding the Call to be a Light in the Darkness*; Moody Press, Chicago; page 99 Kindle Edition

2. The error of Constantinople

3. When the church looks like the world

D. America was founded on the principle of a constitution that ensures religious freedom, not a single religion itself.

II. New laws after a victory in chapters 1 and 2.

III. New laws were met with old faith.

A. They held on to faith.

1. Perhaps they thought of The Lord's promise to Isaiah a few decades earlier was on their mind.

Isaiah 43:1-3 NASB 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. ³For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;'

2. Caution: Promises are meant to remind us of God's care, not to lock God into a pattern.

a. That is the way Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness — "Go ahead and jump! God will make His angels catch you!"

b. The church has a history full of martyrs who were consumed by the flame — but all were in the arms of God as they suffered.

c. Their response to the king indicated they knew they were in God's care whether he delivered them from the flame or not.

d. The question in this story was not whether or not they would escape the fire — but whether or not God would be with them. That is the issue we must settle when facing the valley of the shadow of death.

B. They held on to hope.

1. A confident expectation that commits details to God.

2. Timing, method, and specifics are left to The Lord

C. They held on to love.

1. **Matthew 10:18 NIV** On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.
2. A look at the “fourth man”
3. Stephen’s Martyrdom
4. “A number of them looked into the sky, as though looking at something or someone.”

Christian Life Lessons

1. Expect opposition.

- A. **1 Peter 4:12-14 NASB** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though something strange were happening to you; ¹³but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be overjoyed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, and of God, rests upon you.

2. Join with those around the world who are suffering.

- A. Voice of The Martyrs
- B. The Manhattan Declaration - “We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar’s. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God’s.”
manhattandeclaration.org

3. At the same time, we must be willing to stand alone - if only for a moment.

- A. Dietrich Bonhoeffer died naked on Hitler’s gallows.

- B. Many heroes died without ever being known to history.
- C. Others drowned out the cries of victims by “singing louder.”
- D. May we never fear the furnace more than we fear God.
- E. Terrifying? Absolutely.
- F. It is better to be honored by heaven than by this present world.
 - 1) “What does it matter how we look in Germany compared with how we look in Heaven?” - Martin Niemoller
 - 2) “Yet you still have a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” Revelation 3:4