**DOING THE RIGHT THING**

**(Daniel 3:1-30)**

This past week I was visiting with a hospice patient of mine. She was telling me about her childhood. She grew up going to a Presbyterian school in Covington. She said all the girls were made to “walk the line.” Walk the line is not a phrase we use much anymore. I looked it up to make sure I knew what she meant. To walk the line is “to abide by [moral standards](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=moral%20standards); to walk a straight path of decency by following the rules; to ‘walk the straight and narrow.’” After recalling that they were made to walk the line, she added, “We didn’t have time for stupid.”

On a previous visit, this same patient told me that back in her day, the kids from Covington went to high school in Garber. She said there was a distinct difference between the girls from the Presbyterian school and the girls from Garber. In her view, the girls from Garber were a little loose with the boys. I suppose that in her mind, the girls from Garber made time for stupid. They didn’t walk the line.

As I look around our culture, it seems to me that a whole lot of people are making time for stupid. Very few people make any attempt to walk the line.

In 1956, Johnny Cash wrote and recorded the song, “I Walk the Line.” He said the lyrics came to him as quickly as he could write them down, and he completed the song in 20 minutes while backstage. He was newly married, and in the song, he is pledging his fidelity to his wife.

I want to share the first three verses of his song, but I want you to consider how they apply, not to a romantic relationship with someone else but to our spiritual relationship with God:

I keep a close watch on this heart of mine  
I keep my eyes wide open all the time  
I keep the ends out for the tie that binds  
Because you’re mine, I walk the line  
  
I find it very, very easy to be true  
I find myself alone when each day is through  
Yes, I’ll admit that I’m a fool for you  
Because you’re mine, I walk the line  
  
As sure as night is dark and day is light  
I keep you on my mind both day and night  
And happiness I’ve known proves that it’s right  
Because you’re mine, I walk the line

When we are devoted to God, we want to do the right thing, and we want to be true to Him regardless of the price.

Today, we come to Daniel 3. In this chapter, there are three Hebrew exiles who are serving the King of the Empire of Babylon. They are committed to walking the line, to being true to their God, even at great personal cost. Let’s read their story. Based on this story, I’m going to make five statements regarding what is involved in “Doing the Right Thing.”

1. **DOING THE RIGHT THING WILL NOT BE THE POPULAR THING.**

Look at v. 7. We are told that when all the people heard the sound of the music, **all the peoples** fell down and worshiped the golden image that the King had set up. No one protested. No one circulated a petition saying this is wrong. No one rioted in the streets for reform. They all did what they had been instructed to do, all that is, except three Jewish men.

This act of civil disobedience did not go unnoticed. Now, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not try to bring attention to themselves. They didn’t flaunt their disobedience to the King’s order; they just didn’t obey it.

Four times over the last four weeks, Jane Fonda has been arrested at climate change rallies. She is intentionally disobeying the law and doing it publicly with the intent of being arrested so as to bring attention to the cause she has adopted—the Green New Deal.

The intent of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was not to rally support for anything. They were simply doing their best to obey their conscience and the word of God which forbade them from having any other god or bowing down to an idol or image.

They could have said, “Well, let’s just go along to get along,” or “When in Babylon, do what the Babylonians do.” They sought to do the right thing as they understood it, but they were in the definite minority.

Why is it that the text says nothing about Daniel? Very likely, his responsibilities had taken him elsewhere, and he wasn’t available to lend his support.

There was a day in our nation when the majority of people held a Christian worldview. That is not to say that everyone was a Christian or that everyone lived Christianly, but the Judeo-Christian view of morality was the consensus. In such a view, a sexual relationship outside of the marriage relationship was not acceptable. People viewed pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, and non-marital sex as wrong.

In 1965, 3.1% of white babies were born to unwed mothers. Today, that number is 29%. In 1965, 24% of black babies were born to unwed mothers. Today, it is 71%. Over all, 40% of the babies born today are born to women who have no husband.

There was a day when you were shamed if you had sex before marriage. Today, virginity before marriage is viewed as a source of shame. Once upon a time, cohabitation before marriage was frowned upon. Today, it is seen as normal.

I knew Thelma Lee when she was in her early 90’s. She lived to be about 102 or 103. I was her pastor on Monkey Island, and she was my landlord. I lived in the house next to hers. She had lived there before it ever became an island. All the land around there was farmed by men whom she called the salt of the earth. She said their word was their bond. They didn’t need to sign a contract. A handshake was just fine. If they said they were going to do something, they were going to do it and do the best they could.

That is not the way it is today, and it hasn’t been that way for some time. Today, people will look you in the face and say one thing. Then, when you turn around, they will do something completely different.

One of my favorite Dr. Seuss books involves Horton the Elephant. In the story, *Horton Hatches an Egg,* Horton says repeatedly, “I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. An Elephant’s faithful 100 per cent.”

There seems to be very few Horton’s in our world today. If you are one, you are in the definite minority. Doing the right thing is just not the popular thing.

1. **DOING THE RIGHT THING MAY GET US INTO BIG TROUBLE.**

The music would play, and everybody on cue would bow down to the golden image. Everybody would bow that is, except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Maybe they would stop. Maybe they wouldn’t. I don’t know. But they certain did not bow down.

Guess who ratted them out. Look at vv. 8-12. The Chaldeans of which the text speaks were men like these exiles who had been trained to be astrologist, magicians, seers, and the like. They were, no doubt, jealous of how these Hebrews ascended the ranks so quickly. If they could get them out of the way, they could experience professional success and promotion.

Their plan worked. King Nebuchadnezzar reacted just as they thought he would. Look at v. 13. I think the King had a soft spot for these men. They had served him well, but he could not allow such blatant disregard for his commands to go unchallenged. He asked them a question, but it doesn’t appear that he waited for an answer. Instead, he gave them another chance to prove themselves, but he warned them what would happen if they did not do what they were commanded.

The three could have rationalized their way into a different response and a different outcome. They could have said, “Well, you know, we were always taught to respect our authorities. We are supposed to obey the King, aren’t we? If we just do a quick bow, we can keep our position, and we can do a lot of good. What good is going to come out of us getting ourselves killed?”

The three Jewish men did not think that way. They quickly said to the King, “There’s no need to go through all that because we are not going to serve your gods, and we are not going to bow to the image that you set up.”

Upon hearing that, smoke began to pour from the King’s ears. He was not used to his orders being so blatantly defied. He ordered the fire to be heated seven times hotter than normal. He had the men bound in their clothes and thrown into the furnace.

When you act for conscience sake and do what you believe to be the right thing, you may have to pay a price.

When the Obama administration announced the rules that went along with Obama Care, businesses were told that they had to provide health care for the employees that included birth control medication which also included a drug that would cause a fertilized egg to be spontaneously aborted. Religious institutions were not going to be exempt from this regulation. The Green family, who own Hobby Lobby and Mardel Office Supply stores, said we are not going to do it. They faced a heavy fine for non-compliance. They sued the government. They, no doubt, spent a pile of money on that lawsuit. If they lost it, they were prepared to shut down their businesses.

Fortunately, they won their suit.

Not everyone is so fortunate. In 2012, Jack Phillips, owner of the Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado was asked to bake a cake celebrating a gay couple’s wedding. He refused on the grounds of his religious beliefs. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission found that Mr. Phillips had discriminated against this couple based on their sexual orientation and ordered the business to provide cakes for same-sex couples, to change its policies, and to provide training to its employees to guard against future acts of discrimination.

Mr. Phillips lost his appeal to the Colorado Court of Appeals. He appealed all the way to the Supreme Court. The Justice Department of the Trump administration, fortunately, took up the case on Mr. Phillips behalf. He won a partial ruling from the Supreme Court. They did not decide the case on the basis of freedom of religion, however.

Just think of all the time, money, and effort that went in to defending a person because he did what he thought was right.

There may come a day when we here in America will face persecution for practicing our faith. That day is already here and has been here for some time in other parts of our world. We need to stand with our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted for practicing their faith.

1. **DOING THE RIGHT THING REQUIRES US TO TRUST IN THE LORD.**

I love the answer the three Hebrew men gave to the King. Look at vv. 16-18. These men put their faith and their lives in God. These men had faith regarding two things.

First, they had faith that God has the power to do what they asked. God could save them. God is far more powerful than the King.

Second, they had faith that God has the wisdom to do what is best. If God chose not to save them, they concluded that God was doing what was best. God doesn’t save every-one who faces martyrdom and persecution. Some lose their lives. Some lose their health. Some lose loved ones.

I am convinced that God takes bad things and works good thing from them on behalf of His kingdom.

In February of 2015, 21 construction workers were taken captive by ISIS. They were said to be Coptic Christians. A Coptic Christian is an Egyptian who is a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church. They were accused by ISIS as being people of the cross and followers of the hostile Egyptian Church. All 21 were wearing orange jumpsuits, and they were brutally beheaded. A video was made of their deaths.

It was later learned that 20 of the 21 were Coptic believers. The 21st man was from Ghana. He was not believed to have originally been a Christian. He was asked by a member of ISIS if he rejected Jesus. Knowing what would happen to him and knowing what had happened to those who affirmed their faith, he said, “Their God is my God,” and he laid down his life for his new Savior.

Will you trust Christ with your life, your death, and with everything in between?

1. **DOING THE RIGHT THING WILL BRING US CLOSER TO JESUS.**

The Bible doesn’t describe what this furnace looked like. I believe it may have been an open area built next to the side of a hill. It may have had side but no top. Someone high above could look down into it.

The text tells us that the three Jewish men fell into it while bound. The guards who got them close to the opening of the pit were killed by the intensity of the fire.

The King saw four, not three, men walking in the fire. The only thing that burned was the cords that bound them. The King said the fourth man in the furnace, looked like a son of the gods. He wasn’t too far off base. I believe He saw the pre-incarnate Jesus.

There are several passages in the OT that speak of a being who shows up. Sometimes we told that it is the angel of the LORD—not *an* angel but *the* angel. We are left to our imagination to determine who it was. For instance, Jacob wrestled all night with an unnamed being. I think it may have been Jesus. In Genesis 3 we are told that Adam and Eve heard God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, and God spoke to them face-to-face.

I believe the fourth man in the fire was Jesus. Jesus shows up when you and I are in need. We may not see Him with our physical eyes, but that does not mean He is not present.

In recent years there have been numerous shootings in our own country. Some have been domestic acts of terrorism and some have been religiously motivated. In 2015 an Islamic couple perpetrated a mass shooting at the man’s place of work in San Bernardino in which 14 were killed and 22 were wounded. One of the survivors was a 27-year-old woman named Denise Peraza. Her life was spared, not because the shooters failed to see her, but because a valiant man named Shannon Johnson shielded her body with his own and saved her life. Listen to her account:

Wednesday morning at 10:55 A.M. we were seated next to each other at a table, joking about how we thought the large clock on the wall might be broken because time seemed to be moving so slowly. I would have never guessed that only five minutes later, we would be huddled next to each other under the same table, using a fallen chair as a shield from over 60 rounds of bullets being fired across the room. While I cannot recall every single second that played out that morning, I will always remember his left arm wrapped around me, holding me as close as possible next to him behind that chair. And amidst all the chaos, I’ll always remember him saying these three words: “I got you.”

Just maybe, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego felt that fourth man hugging them and they heard Him say, “I got you. I got you. I got you.”

In Hebrews 13:5, the author of that letter quoted from Deuteronomy 31:6 which contains a promise from God to us: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

You may not always feel His presence, but that doesn’t mean He’s not present. When we do the right thing and difficulty comes our way, Jesus will draw close.

1. **DOING THE RIGHT THING WILL SERVE THE PURPOSES OF GOD.**

Look at what happened as a result of the faithfulness of the three. Notice vv. 26-30.

What happened could not be explained as anything other than a mighty miracle. This was not slight of hand. This was not a neat parlor trick. This was nothing less than a God-sighting, and the God that came in view was the God of the Hebrews.

King Nebuchadnezzar was not yet a saved man. He was impressed but not yet converted. God had not yet broken him. That would come later.

I can’t answer why bad things happen to good people. I don’t know why faithful servants of the Lord get cancer or why they die young. I don’t know why God allows his children to be persecuted solely because they name the name of Jesus. I don’t know why such things happen, but I believe God can use such things to achieve His own purposes. I don’t believe God causes such tragedies, but I do believe God uses them for His own purposes.

You may remember the story of Andrew Brunson. He was an American pastor who had been working in the nation of Turkey. He did church planning. He worked with refugees. Pastor Brunson was from North Carolina, but he had lived and ministered in Turkey for 20 years.

After a failed military coup, Pastor Brunson was arrested along with journalists and others, and he was labeled by the Turkish government as a spy.

He was held for more than a year without charges being filed. Finally, charges were made, and a lengthy trial ensued. He spent nearly two years in a Turkish prison. Finally, after much pressure from the Trump administration, Brunson was released and was returned to the U.S.

Sometime after his release he spoke in chapel at Wheaton College. Oddly, he said he did not feel God’s presence with him during his lengthy prison stay. Instead, he claimed, “I completely lost the sense of God’s presence. God was silent. And He remained silent for two years.” He said:

There are some who go into the valley of testing and some do not make it out . . . I was broken. I lay there alone in my solitary cell, I had great fear, terrible grief, and I was weeping. And the thought kept going through my mind, Where are you God? Why are you so far away? And I opened my mouth as I wept aloud, and I was surprised at what I heard coming out of my mouth. I heard, “I love you Jesus. I love you Jesus. I love you Jesus.” I thought here is my victory. Even if you’re silent, I love you. Even if you let my enemy harm me, I love you. [As] Jesus said, “But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

As I said earlier, you don’t have to feel God’s presence for Him to be present, but keep trusting, keep loving. He will give you the victory.