

HARRINGAY UNITED CHURCH-BAPTISTSUNDAY 23RD AUGUST 2009.

Topic: Righteous Disobedience

Text: Daniel 3:1-18

Introduction:

Each day comes with opportunities for Christians to honour God by what they think, say and do and today is not an exception and you are not an exception either.

The chief executive of a company told his secretary to lie for him that he was not in the office when someone he did not want to speak with telephoned him. She refused to lie and handed the receiver to him to say that he was not in the office himself.

After he answered the telephone, he had a go at the secretary and demanded reasons why she should not be sacked. The secretary replied him, 'lying for you is a licence for me to lie to you'. He shook his head and said you are better than me. This comment came because she stood out and would not compromise.

A five year old boy took the phone to his mum when someone called, the mum told him to say that she is not at home. The boy told the caller, 'mummy says she is not at home. Today another day of such opportunities.

Today, I am going to talk about righteous disobedience but before then, let me remind you that God deliberately allowed the faithful Jews to be taken captive as he said in Jeremiah 24:5-7 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.'" NIV

This suggests that God can take us to a place out of our comfort zone where things are unfamiliar and uncertain in order to grow and mature us. It is true for what Warren Wiersbe said 'the Devil tempts us to destroy our faith but God tests us to develop our faith'.

The Gold Image

King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold image measuring 9 feet by 90 feet and erected it at the plain of Dura in Babylon. It is not clear when he erected this statue but some scholars believe that it is about twenty years after his first dream that Daniel interpreted. Why did he do this? I have some probable reasons.

1. Human memory is very short and he must have forgotten that there is a God who only is to be worshipped. The king who had an encounter with the Hebrew God and declared Him the God of gods now want people to worship the gods he made with his own hands, how stupid it is to bow down to what you have made by your own hands.
2. Pride has entered his heart. He conquered the whole world but failed to conquer his own heart. But the saying goes thus 'pride goes before fall'. He wanted to test how firmly he has his kingdom in control.
3. It is possible that he wanted to use the occasion to re-establish his authority and compel dedication his official of his kingdom hence he summoned all the rulers from all the kingdoms to appear at the plain of Dura to worship the image he had made. Lord Acton said "'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.'" Especially when they equate themselves to God.
4. Probably it is an act of God to put the young Hebrews to the test whether they will bow down once for a graven image. The Devil will tempt Christians to destroy their faith but God will test them to develop their faith.

He also decreed that anyone who will not bow down to the image he erected would be thrown into blazing furnace which is a dare consequence.

All the official but three obeyed the king

All the officials from all the regions assembled before the image and all kinds of musical instruments were played and they bowed down to worship the image. Nevertheless the Devil was at work, watching the Hebrews whether they would bow down or not. The Astrologers (the Chaldeans AV) went to the king to report Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah that they did not bow down to worship the image the king had commanded everyone to worship. They also reminded the king of the consequence of the disobedience to his decree.

The king's Reaction:

Of course the king was furious to hear that some people did not bow down to worship the image he made. This is dangerous for anyone to do that. For it is disobedience in the highest order as it constitute mutiny and of course in any authority of those days and some of today, its penalty is death but this is not just execution but thrown alive in a blazing fire.

The king did well to give the three Hebrews one more chance to comply with the command to save them. But he did badly to say 'who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

This confirms how power corrupts those who are in position and they think they are all in all and without them the world will collapse. Only God is sovereign and no one is like Him.

Righteous Disobedience or Obedience to the Righteous One

The three Hebrews refused to obey the king and listen to what they say

Daniel 3:17-18 "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. 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." NIV

Verse 17 affirmed their beliefs and certain assurance that God is able to rescue them but what does verse 18 signifies? I believe that it gives a warning to the king that his threat will not make them change their minds and they would be prepared to die for the God they believed in.

This reminds me of the primary school history I did in 1963 about the spread of Islam to the Northern part of Nigeria. A man called Othman Dan Fodio led a jihad and held the Quran on one hand and sword on the other and people are asked to choose on, if you fail to choose the Quran, they are beheaded. Many people lost their lives because they held to their own beliefs.

Today too in many parts of the world where Christians are being persecuted, many lives are being lost today because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Those are the people with true faith just like the three Hebrews. Their faith is not depended on what they can get from God but on who God is.

There was a story about someone who believed that God offended him and he wanted revenge from God's children. He sharpened his cutlass very well; went into a Church and shouted that God offended him and he wants revenge on God's children. Therefore he gave the people two choices, he asked those who are not God's children to come to one side and those who are not on the other and then he will kill God's children. To no one's surprise, nobody was left on the side of God's children except the Pastor. Then the man turned to the pastor, you do not have Christians in your church they are all hypocrites and liars and challenged him that he had much more difficult job to do to build the faith of the people.

How does this relate to me?

1. Pride is evil. Pride went into king Nebuchadnezzar, he thought he was too powerful but forgotten that it was God who put him there and he only is to be worship. By asking people to worship his image is to substitute it for God and it bounds to fail.

We have to be careful whichever position we are that that it is God who puts us there and he is in charge

2. The Hebrew men knew their God and what he demanded. They knew their shama/shema (Exodus 20:3,5 "You shall have no other gods before ^a me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them.." NIV)

We too must know our God and what He demanded of us, that placing anything before Him is idolatry and there are many of them today, money, position, political correctness, to mention but few.

3. The Hebrews' faith is a true faith that obeys God regardless of the feeling within them, the circumstances around them or the consequences before them. I had a devotion with my children the other day from this passage and I asked them what they would do if they find themselves in the position of these three Hebrews. Their unanimous response was that they will bow down. But I know they are still growing and pray that they will know their God better.

The Hebrews did not compromise and there are many excuses to. They would have said it is only one once and they would never do it again.

They could say they bow down their knees but not their hearts

They could argue that everyone does it why would they be different since they are slaves anyway why should they disobey their master?

We must remember that compromise once takes us out of the will of God. Satan only wanted Jesus to bow down just once to get the earth's kingdom but he even refused that once, we too must refuse to bow down.

4. Their faith was not presumptuous or commercial. By presumptuous faith I mean they did not take God for granted because he is sovereign, they do not know what the will of God is, though he has promised them to be with them when they pass through the fire in Isaiah 42:1-2. Many people today are so presumptuous and do take God for granted without exercising wisdom in handling their affairs. We must be wise and never take God for granted.

Commercial faith is the faith that says I obey God if He rewards me for doing so. I serve Him if things are going on well for me. That is wrong motive and it must be corrected soon.

Please do not get me wrong, serving God must be based on what we can get out of it even though He promised us things but our conviction about what Christ has done for us on the Cross. If our faith is based on the former, we will be frustrated and disappointed but if it is based on the latter, we will enjoy the abundance of God's blessing.

To conclude: The three Hebrews stuck to their guns even though they knew the consequences, their faith was not afraid of the consequences. They did not waver even though they were persuaded by the second chance.

I encourage you to stick to your guns too no matter what criticism or attack. To know what God can do let us wait till next Sunday and bring someone to listen to this exciting news.