

July 15, 2018

In the world, but not of it...

Jesus said to his disciples, as recorded in John 15.18-19: ***If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.***

So the idea in Christian understanding is that followers of Christ are to be *in* the world - moving about nature and intermingling with other human beings - but we are not to be *of* the world - meaning the fallen and evil world system that is corrupted by greed, pride, envy, and strife and ruled by Satan. Or to put it another way, we are to be engaged with the culture and trying to draw people toward Christ, while at the same time remaining faithful to Christ. So we are at work in the world, but we are totally committed to Christ and living in such a way that others can receive a good witness.

This is the struggle of all those who follow Christ...and it was the struggle of Daniel and his friends in Babylon around 600 BC. In today's story, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego find themselves being threatened with death when they stand up for God. Amazingly, they place no conditions on their loyalty to God. Their love and devotion is not dependent on their circumstances or the outcome of their predicament. Indeed, deliverance or martyrdom are equal possibilities.

How often do we put conditions on our faith? I'll trust you, God, if you do this or that for me.... I'll follow you, Jesus, if you do this or that...

Even If

There is a great new song by the contemporary music group, **Mercy Me**, that demonstrates the same kind of faith that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had when facing the consequences of not bowing down to a golden idol.

Bart Millard, one of the members of Mercy Me, explains part of the meaning behind this song:

"Even If" is a reminder to people in difficult situations that don't seem to go away. God is worthy long before any of those circumstances even showed up. This song is a declaration to God that even if He went silent and never said another word, He's still worthy to be praised and that He's our greatest hope in the midst of the trial."

Indeed, Daniel and his friends experienced the challenges of living in the midst of a culture that did not know God, and themselves trying to stay faithful to God *AND* connected to their culture. They were walking quite a tightrope and there were times that their survival was anything but a "sure thing."

But in the end, what matters for each of us, is having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. For we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus. As we grow in that faith, we will learn how to stand up for Jesus, whether he saves us from the fire...or not.

