

Sample Sermon – Douglas Hagler

“Shadrach, Meeshach and Abednego first affirm their faith in God, their hope in God, that God will come to their rescue in the furnace and by a miracle save them. But next they say that even if God does not save them, even if there is no hope, they still will not worship Nebuchadnezzar’s idol. Even if they are alone in this, if God is present but will not intervene, they will not worship the idol.

This, to me, feels true. This feels like real life. This feels like human experience.

It is true of small things. When I preach, there is no guarantee that God will speak through me. I obviously hope so, but there is no guarantee. I cannot summon God, I cannot have God stand at attention or arrive on time. A god I can summon with my fumbling words isn’t God at all.

And I think it is true of big things. Jesus sweated and prayed in Gethsemane, and begged God to take the cup from him, to spare him, to accomplish what was going to happen some other way. But then he affirmed that even if God did not save him from torture and death, he would not turn aside.

In living out our lives as Christians, we take real risks. The stakes are genuine, and there is no guarantee of comfort or safety. The world is not comfortable and safe, and neither is our calling. We must be willing to burn. That is the kind of courage that is asked of us. We have to be willing to fail, to fall, to look like idiots, to face defeat, to suffer.

And why do we do this? Most of the time, we don’t. But when we do, I think we find something out. The ultimate reward is not safety. It is not comfort. It is not being saved from danger or spared suffering.

The ultimate reward is that, when we are willing to burn, we find that God is with us. In the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, God was there. On the cross on Golgotha, God was there. And in the suffering of the world today, in the suffering we go through in our own lives, God is there. That is where Christ chooses to be. Knowing the consequences. Knowing that pain and loss, failure and abandonment are real; this is where Christ chooses to be – with us in suffering. If we are to follow Christ, that is where we need to be willing to go. In our own suffering, facing the suffering of the world around us, we need to be willing burn. And when we step into the fire, not because we are guaranteed safety, but because it is right, then we come into the presence of the living God.”