

IF YE CONTINUE

Two days ago hateful reprobate with malice aforethought killed six innocent people at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee. The killer was a woman who was angry because some people would not regard her as a man. Head of School Katherine Koonce, when she heard the first shot fired, left her office to investigate. John Drake, Chief of the Nashville Metropolitan Police department said, “There was a confrontation, I’m sure – you can tell the way she was lying in the hallway.” Mrs. Koonce’s pastor told church members, “She gave her life in defense of the children under her care.” Katherine Koonce did not shrink back in the face of death. She gave her life for the children in her charge; she gave her life for Christ. She is a martyr to the cause of Christ. Every Christian ought to be prepared to suffer for that cause.

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel, the people were in high rebellion against the Lord. So the Lord sent Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to attack the southern kingdom of Judah, and carry the people away into exile in Babylon. Among those carried away were Daniel the prophet, and three of his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (Daniel 1:6, 7) They were strangers in a strange land. Because of Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams, the king promoted Daniel to the position of ruler over the whole province of Babylon. Daniel received permission from the king to appoint his three friends as his lieutenants.

The king had a golden idol made, and he commanded that his subjects bow down before it. When some men reported that the three men would not bow down before the idol, the king was enraged. He threatened to have the men thrown into a fiery furnace, and he asked them, “Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Daniel 3:15) Nebuchadnezzar defied God to save the men. They answered:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (Daniel 3:16–18)

The men said that they did not owe the king an answer, but, as a courtesy, they would give him one. God was powerful enough to deliver them from the furnace, and they had confidence that He would deliver them. However, if they knew that God would choose not to deliver them, they still would not serve the king’s gods, or bow down to the image he set up. God has power over life and death, and he has authority over them. His people do not serve Him only if He preserves their lives, however; they serve Him because he is worthy to be served. The king was incensed, and ordered that the heat of the fire be increased, and that the men be cast into it. After the men were cast in, the king saw that they were not consumed by the fire. Moreover, he saw in the fire, not the three men only, but a fourth, who appeared to the king to be a god. This was likely the Son of God Himself, present in the fiery ordeal with them, and protecting them. The king called the three men out of the furnace, and, when they came out, they were unharmed, and even their hair and clothes were not so much as singed. When the king saw their condition, he gave glory to God. So, because of their resistance, and God’s deliverance, the king respected them, and worshiped their God. The three men were willing to serve the king in the administration of his kingdom, but they refused to serve the king’s gods, or worship his idols. They would rather break a man’s laws, than break God’s laws. They would rather lose their high position in the Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, than lose their place in God’s Kingdom. They would rather lose their lives, than lose their souls.

Crowds of people followed Jesus during His earthly ministry, and, in some respect, they believed in Him. Jesus tested their faith, however. On one occasion He said to some Jews that believed in Him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32) The Jews answered that they were Abraham's seed, and were not slaves of anyone. As Abraham's descendants they were God's covenant people; they belonged to God, to no one else. But Jesus spoke, not of political freedom, but of freedom from sin. So, Jesus explained, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34) Jesus told them that being Abraham's descendants did not make them children of Abraham, and it did not make them children of God. A child of God is not a physical descendant of Abraham; God disowned many of Abraham's descendants. The Jews that Jesus addressed were Abraham's descendants, but they wished to murder Jesus, the Son of God, the one whose day Abraham rejoiced to see. Because they would murder the Son of God, they were not true sons of Abraham, or true sons of God. A true child of God is not one who is of the lineage of Abraham; a true child of God is one who is of the faith, and the obedience of Abraham. God sent His Son into the world, so whoever loves the Son has God as his father. A true disciple of Jesus is a child of God. A true disciple of Jesus is one who loves Him, and, because He loves Him, obeys Him. To be a follower of Jesus is to know Jesus, and to know Jesus is to know that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and to be free from spiritual slavery, freedom from sin. A true disciple of Jesus is not one that simply believes in Him; the Jews that Jesus addressed believed in Him, but they wished to kill Him, and He told them that the devil was their father. A true disciple of Jesus is not one that follows Him merely to learn from Him; he is not one that believes in Him only when times are good; he is not one that believes in Him, but does not obey Him. A true disciple of Jesus does not wish simply to live with Jesus; a true disciple of Jesus is one who lives for Him, and who would die for Him.

Jesus tests the faith of His followers. He puts them through trials. He does not ask them to do anything He would not do, however. He asks them to be prepared to die with Him, and for Him, but he suffered and died for them. Moreover, He does not ask them to go it alone. Just as the Son of God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, so is He with every believer in his trials, even if He is unseen except by the eyes of faith.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.