

East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide:

Citizens of Heaven: Persecuted for Our Faith (Daniel 3)

Speaker: Pastor Keith Jenkins

Date: September 22, 2024

Introduction:

In this powerful sermon, Pastor Keith Jenkins continued the "Citizens of Heaven" series by exploring Daniel 3 and the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He emphasized how believers can stand firm in their faith even in the face of persecution.

1. The Reality of Persecution:

Pastor Keith highlighted the current state of persecution faced by Christians worldwide and the biblical expectation of persecution for believers.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you experienced or witnessed persecution for faith in your own life or community?
2. Why do you think Jesus warned His followers to expect persecution?

Supporting Verse:

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."

Context and Reflection:

- Historical/Cultural Context: Jesus was preparing His disciples for the opposition they would face.

- **Theological Significance:** This passage emphasizes the distinct identity of believers and the resulting tension with the world.
- **Application:** We should expect and be prepared for opposition as we live out our faith.

2. Taking a Stand:

Pastor Keith discussed the courageous stand taken by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego against idolatry.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some modern-day "idols" that Christians might be pressured to worship?
2. How can we develop the courage to take a stand for our faith in challenging situations?

Supporting Verses:

Daniel 3:17-18 - "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** These young men were facing a life-or-death decision in a foreign land.
- **Theological Significance:** Their response demonstrates unwavering faith and commitment to God regardless of the outcome.
- **Application:** We should cultivate a faith that remains steadfast even when faced with severe consequences.

3. Maintaining God's Standards:

Pastor Keith emphasized the importance of upholding God's standards even when they conflict with cultural norms.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what areas of life do you find God's standards most at odds with our culture?
2. How can we maintain God's standards while still showing love and respect to those who disagree?

Supporting Verse:

Matthew 5:10-12 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Context and Reflection:

- Historical/Cultural Context: Jesus was teaching His followers about the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Theological Significance: This passage reframes persecution as a blessing and a sign of authentic faith.
- Application: We should view persecution as an opportunity for spiritual growth and a confirmation of our faith.

Conclusion:

Pastor Keith Jenkins' message reminded us that as citizens of heaven, we may face persecution for our faith. However, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we can stand firm in our convictions, trusting in God's presence and power even in the midst of trials.

Reflection Questions:

1. How can you prepare yourself spiritually to face potential persecution or opposition for your faith?

2. In what area of your life do you need to take a firmer stand for God's standards?

3. How can our church community support and encourage one another in the face of cultural opposition?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the example of faith shown by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Give us the courage to stand firm in our convictions, even when faced with opposition or persecution. Help us to maintain your standards in our lives, trusting in your presence and power to sustain us through every trial. May our faith shine brightly as a witness to your grace and truth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

References:

Primary Sources:

"Citizens of Heaven: Persecuted for Our Faith (Daniel 3)," East Hill Church, 09/22/2024. Delivered by Pastor Keith Jenkins.

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Open Doors USA. "World Watch List 2024." Annual report on global persecution of Christians.

Collaborative Contributions:

LLM Contributions: Based on a mixture of licensed data, data created by AI models, and publicly available data, synthesized for the study of the provided sermon notes and biblical passages.

LLM Training Data:

LLM Training Data. Includes a diverse range of texts (books, websites, and other publications) up to April 2024.