

Daniel in Biblical Perspective
A Festival To Remember...But If Not
Daniel 3
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November 8, 2009 – Evening Sermon

Our text for this study is Daniel and I have titled it A Festival to Remember But if Not. Our study in the book of Daniel has been generated for two reasons. One reason is that you and I live in an increasingly pagan society and goes under the term of progressive secularism which is actually the re-birth of paganism. We are seeing an amazing thing in this country. It is a country that is populated by people who have been brought over the space of 500 to 600 years of the work of the Gospel, have been brought out of paganism with all of its destitution and are now willingly plunging themselves back in to paganism with all of its depravity. It's absolutely amazing to watch that.

So how do we live? Are we angry at sin? Yes, but the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. So how is it that we as believers should live? There are two people in the Bible that give us a great example of this. One is Joseph as he leads the people of God in the paganism of Egypt and the other is Daniel as he leads the people of God in the paganism of Babylon. Egypt and Babylon both become synonyms for the world in rebellion against God in the Scripture. Therefore it's appropriate that we would look and see how Daniel for 80 years led God's people through five emperors and two kingdoms. How do they function and how do they live?

The second reason is that we are all interested in where everything is headed in history and that is toward the consummation. The book of Revelation is obviously a key to that understanding of what God has done, is doing and will do as Revelation gives us the things that are, the things we have seen and the things which are to come. But the book of Revelation is directly tied in a powerful way to Old Testament books. One is Zachariah and the other is Daniel. So Daniel becomes an asset for us to study and understand the book of Revelation and the consummation of history.

We have two sections of Daniel that we work our way through. One are the memoirs of Daniel where we see how God's people stood, graciously but firmly, in and for Christ and then there are the messages of Daniel which are the dreams and their interpretations in which we get a glimpse where history is going.

In Daniel 1 we saw the first memoir as Daniel sets the pace for Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) in that while they will go to the pagan international school, take the pagan names but they will not violate the Word of God by participating in food that is designated to the pagan worship. They willingly stand with conviction and God blesses them. Nebuchadnezzar sees the result, after three years they rise in his estimation and are placed in positions of influence in the court. Then we come to Daniel 2 and because of that place of influence Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He doesn't recall the dream or its interpretation and none of his wise men or Chaldeans are able to interpret it for him. So Nebuchadnezzar is about to kill them all but Daniel steps up and says something I love so much from Daniel 2. He doesn't take any credit for himself and with absolute wonderful, humility he says, "There is a God who reveals secrets." Daniel is the one who has been given the ability to interpret these

dreams but he doesn't say, "There is a real wise man who can interpret the dreams from God" but he says, "There is a God who reveals secrets."

God has revealed secrets. God does reveal secrets and God will reveal secrets. This God will reveal and He is light. God had given to Daniel the ability to bring back the dream and its interpretation which is the scope of history all the way from the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires with this image that is gold, silver, brass, iron, then iron and clay. Then there is a stone that is cut from a mountain and that stone destroys the kingdoms of this world and puts in to place a Kingdom that is forever and ever. That stone is Jesus. That mountain is Mount Calvary and that Kingdom becomes Mount Zion that lasts forever and ever.

Nebuchadnezzar is overwhelmed by this and he elevates Daniel, along with Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) that much higher. But could there have been something in the back of Nebuchadnezzar's mind? Oh we see him obviously influenced. The first part of that image that he had dreamed about was the head and shoulders that were made of gold and that represented Babylon which means it represented Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar somehow misses the import of the dream and that is there is a King whose Kingdom is forever who will destroy the kingdoms of this world that stand opposed to Him. Somehow Nebuchadnezzar reverts back to that part of the image when which the gold is now elevated and it becomes all about him again.

There is a song that says "You alone will I worship" and that is the absolutely inevitable challenge that will face you and me everyday of our life. Will we be true worshipers of the True God? Who will we worship? How will we worship? Will we worship the One true and living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and will we worship in Spirit and Truth? The incessant movement of a pagan culture is always at the issue of worship. When the state rises up and when those in power rise up they will do the bidding of Satan to try to stop the worship of the One true and living God. Daniel 3 brings us to that moment. In terms of what occurs we will first look at the first seven verses. Daniel has been given the dream and they have been put in a position of prestige.

Daniel 3:1-7 says, *1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace (means an intensely burning furnace)." 7 Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

As one enemy of the Gospel has said, “man is incurably religious.” Man will worship. It may be the instant replays of your favorite athlete. It may be an athletic team. It may be a powerful figure of government. It may be a religious celebrity. We were made to worship and we will worship. We are not only incurably religious and committed to worship but we are also incurably committed to counterfeiting gods and putting them in the place of the One true and living God. John Calvin said, “The heart is an unstoppable idol factory” and it will create counterfeit gods and counterfeit worship. Satan’s schemes are multiple. He has secular worship to take the place of Biblical worship. He has entertainment worship, recreation worship and he will take good and fine things of life and he will put them up as the objects of our allegiance, adoration, and affection in life.

If Satan can’t get us to secular worship then he will falsify worship even within the church of Jesus Christ. He falsifies worship by getting the wrong object of worship and I believe that has happened today. I believe in many evangelical churches today, we don’t worship God but we worship, worship. We don’t gather to worship God we gather to worship, worship and what I obtain from it instead of how God is exalted from it. Are there blessings in worship? Absolutely, but we don’t gather for the blessings. We gather, “Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy Name.” Is it any accident that counterfeit worship makes full use of power, makes full use of personality? We see Nebuchadnezzar’s power and Nebuchadnezzar’s personality and by the way, is it any accident that Satan who was the cherub (having something to do with music in his original creation) that anoints, loves to use music for false worship. It is so bad in this text that he even has the audacity to use bagpipes for false worship. My heart sank when I saw that. I prefer the Old King James language there where it uses a dulcimer instead, but that’s exactly what it was.

Here we have string and wind instruments. I’m not a musician but I did some research on it and I could give you all of the aspects of these instruments but the one thing about these instruments that are listed (and listed on numerous occasions) in the text is that they are incapable of producing harmony and melody. These are instruments that when played would produce a cacophony, meaning noise. The instruments listed when played by themselves would produce loud, overwhelming noise that would capture, intimidate and direct.

So here is this false worship that is called for and promoted by Nebuchadnezzar. He takes this golden image I’m sure playing off of the golden head from his dream, raises it up to enormous proportions and calls all the people through all the leaders to come and bow down in false worship instead of true worship of the true and living God. When Nebuchadnezzar does this what will Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) do?

Before I read the next section in Daniel 3 here is some historical background. At this point we are probably about 20 years into the exile and when he refers to the Jews in Daniel 3:8 he is not looking at all the Jews here. “The Jews” is a phrase that has come in the first two chapters to refer to Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego). Daniel 3:8-12 says, **8** *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.* **9** *They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever!* **10** *You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of*

music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. 11 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Here comes the accusation. There are three men out there whom you have appointed to a high place and when the music sounded these three men did not bow. They did not fall down and worship, unlike everybody else O king. The decree said that they were to bow down and worship and if they didn't then the decree was that they were to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. Now, what does Nebuchadnezzar do?

Daniel 3:13-15 says, **13** *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”* Then comes an amazing statement that rivals one made about the Titanic when it was said “Nothing can sink this ship.” It rivals the pomposity of that statement when Nebuchadnezzar says, “*And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*”

Daniel 3:16, 17 says, **16** *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.”* So one He is able to deliver them and two is He will deliver them. Daniel 3:18 says, “*But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”* In my preparing for this study, my heart soared. This point in history is about 5 to 20 years in the exile and these young men will not be captured by intimidation. They will hold fast to the true worship of the true and living God. They will hold fast no matter what to God centered worship and that's why God made them, saved them and sustained them. They said, “We will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have made.”

Daniel 3:19-25 says, **19** *Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the **expression of his face was changed** against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.* (This is similar to when a little child gets upset. He screws up his face into some contortion. He has so much rage it absolutely takes over his facial expressions.) *He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.* (How stupid is this? If I'm mad at you and I want to burn you up, why would I heat it up seven times worse? I'd cool it down a bit and let you suffer longer, but he's so mad he heats it up.) **20** *And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.* (In other words, he dressed them up and put everything on them.) **22** *Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." 25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." That would be the pagan's way of saying angelic.

Daniel 3:26-30 says, 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. 28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

I want to divide this up into three sections. The first thing I want you to see is the response of the Hebrews. The response of the Hebrews is conviction. I want to give you five areas of conviction of the Hebrews (Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego)). The first one is conviction that is based upon God's Word. This is not a conviction of arrogance or self-promotion. God's Word declares that worship is to be given to the One true and living God and to be given in a way that is acceptable to Him and there is never any contingency to call us away from true worship of the One true and living God.

The second area of conviction was that it was true even in the face of peril, even if it cost them their life. Worship was to be given to the One true and living God.

Thirdly, they had a conviction that had confidence. Our God is able to deliver us. They were confident in that He was not only able to deliver us but He will deliver us from your hand. He may decide not to deliver us out of the fiery furnace but He will deliver us from your hand, O king.

This brings us to number four. They had a conviction without presumption. They didn't go into this saying, "O God, I now name and claim that You're going to send us out of the fiery furnace." They just simply said, "Our God is able and if He decides to miraculously deliver us from the fiery furnace then praise His name but if He decides to allow the fire to burn us then He will deliver us from your hand in that way, in which that would be promotion day. We die. No matter what He will be able to deliver us from your hand but they had no presumption as to how God would do this. We must get away from this notion that faith is expressed by arrogance in telling God how He is to accomplish His purposes in our life. We don't name and claim. We don't name and claim direction of how we tell God He is to do it. We are to say to God, "You're able and Your ways are always right and we will trust for what You do is always right. Your ways may not be our ways but Your way will always be the right way." So they had a

confidence with conviction in the power of God and a confidence without presumption that somehow they were to direct God.

The fifth area of conviction was they had a conviction with contentment. No matter what He does we are content with His answer. The place was Dunkirk and the last remnants of British soldiers on the European continent were now surrounded. The Blitz of German power had pushed them all the way back up against the ocean and the English Channel. All of England was in prayer. The radio messages continued back and forth. You all know the story of the providences of God that sent the fogs upon the Channel and the many small boats that were launched from England by hundreds of Englishmen that came and rescued the soldiers at Dunkirk. That's a fact of history. What many people don't know was the last radio message from those soldiers on that night was "We will stand. Our God is able but if not." We live in a society today that if a message ended "But if not" we would say, "Why didn't they finish the sentence?" At that time because of the impact of Christianity when they said, "but if not" all of England knew what they were saying. They now put their trust in the providence of God. Either He would deliver them and bring them across the Channel or He would deliver them as they would die faithful to the end. "But if not."

So there is conviction that is based upon God's Word. Their conviction was in the face of peril. Their conviction was based with confidence in God and without presumption in their direction of God and it was a conviction with contentment.

The second section deals with the response of Nebuchadnezzar to this conviction of the Hebrews. The response of Nebuchadnezzar is anger which brings us to foolishness. The anger of man does not achieve the purposes of God and the anger of man is something that eventually be always regretted in light of the fact that it leads to foolishness, confusion and inevitable consequences of despair. So it was with Nebuchadnezzar. His rage was expressed in the contortion of his face, in the issuing of nonsensical orders when he heated up the furnace seven times hotter and he goes to all of those extensions out of his anger.

I believe that anger is a God given emotion but Nebuchadnezzar becomes a wonderful example to us of what the anger of man produces and that anger of man can even be in our lives. There are all kinds of things that are around us right now. We are seeing the devolution and the deconstruction of our culture. It is right for us to be angry at sin but it is wrong that we have the anger of man. That will lead us to actions that we will eventually regret. We may feel better because we have ventilated but it will not be effective for the cause of Christ. Our movement must be the proclamation of the Gospel of grace that exposes sin but exalts not the self righteous anger of offended religious people but exalts the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that will deliver any and all people from their sin and by God's grace change their hearts and lives.

Nebuchadnezzar's anger was like all anger of men. It is nonsensical and produces cartoonish behavior. It is something that we always look back on and say "Why was I so out of control" but there is the Holy Spirit who in place of the deeds of the flesh will give something more glorious. The Spirit dispenses envy, confusion and the anger of man but the calm, courage, conviction, compassion and yet boldness of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will be in its place.

The third section is the response of God in the text. There are five things I want you to notice about the response of God. First of all, God sovereignly determined to

intervene with a miraculous christophany. From what we have uncovered archeologically in places like this, the fiery furnace was more like a pit. On my trips to Israel I take people to an early pagan altar to show them where the fire would be built and underneath was an opening where they could stoke the wind and heat the fire that much more. It was probably a pit in which you would have fire and would have some type of enclosure. It would be open enough so that from a safe distance Nebuchadnezzar would be able to look down and in to it because you'll notice in the text it says they were cast down. So Nebuchadnezzar is looking down into it. He is also able to look over it. He has dressed these men up in their finery and the king's mighty men have cast them into the fire and from a distance he looks and is astonished.

He doesn't see the three men by themselves. He sees the three men but he also sees a fourth. The fourth was one in his language like "a son of the gods." The Hebrew language would have been angelic. The question is this an angel sent from God to deliver them and encourage them in the midst of this or is this Christ Himself? Is this one of those precious moments in the Old Testament called a christophany? This coming Christmas season I want to preach about the epiphany, the appearance of Christ in the New Testament, the Incarnation. By the way, there is a second epiphany coming and that is when He is coming again, where He will appear again. But in this text we have an Old Testament epiphany of God, an appearance of God. Is this like the angel of the Lord who is the living God, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ that wrestles with Jacob, that comes to Gideon, that speaks from the burning bush to Moses or is this an angel from the Lord? I don't think the text gives us enough information to be able to say this is an angel but it's not the angel of the Lord that is a very technical term referring to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ Himself in a pre-incarnate appearance in the Old Testament as some other texts make very clear.

I tend to lean toward the fact that it is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ although it could have been just an angel. Which ever one it is the purpose is accomplished. The reason I happen to believe it is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ is because this phrase "the son of the gods" allows us to move toward the statement of divinity and also Daniel is going to be the one that gives us Jesus' favorite term to refer to Himself, the Son of Man. So both aspects are being highlighted in the book of Daniel. Now we have a miraculous christophany. Why? It is because God sovereignly determined to do that in this case.

Will Jesus come from the throne and intervene into every moment when people are being martyred for Christ personally? Not necessarily, sometimes He will send angels and He'll always have His Holy Spirit there. He will always give the strength that you need for as your days are so shall your strength be. He will always be with you because of His Spirit in your life but God's miracles are sovereignly determined. Miracles are not an entitled right that come to me because I'm a Christian. Miracles are acts of God that are done with a purpose at the appropriate time for His glory, honor and His purposes.

As I have mentioned before, miracles tend to cluster together around significant times where God is doing great things. For instance, there are the miracles around the Exodus, in the days of Elijah, in the days of Daniel and the Babylonian captivity and restoration, and there are the miracles at the incarnation of Christ and His 30 year ministry. There are also the miracles that cluster around the establishment of the New

Testament church. So I believe there are miracles because whenever God invades the natural order with supernatural power that is by definition a miracle. That is just God being God. But what does the Bible call these? The Bible calls these signs, wonders and miracles. Miracles are supernatural acts of God designed to produce wonder as a sign where God is saying something when He does it. God sovereignly determines to intervene and not simply to intervene miraculously but to intervene with a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

Secondly, when God does the miraculous it is clear and manifest to all. Miracles are not done in secret or something I privately observe. Miracles are done in public and when God does a miracle He does it publicly, obviously to all. So all of these Chaldeans, prefects, wise men, satraps and governors are all there to see what is going on. God doesn't do private miracles. He does them for a public purpose that He is accomplishing. When God does a miracle it is clear and manifest to all.

Thirdly, miracles are complete and full in nature. The other day I was flipping through channels on the TV and I saw one of those your "miracle" for the day services. There was a man there who had been lame his whole life and they said to him, "Now you're healed, so walk!" The man is just hobbling along and they said, "Keep trying God will get better." It was all I could do not to start praying the imprecatory Psalms right then. When God does a miracle He doesn't need any help to loosen up the joints. When God does a miracle He does a miracle and a miracle is a miracle. So when the king looked in the furnace what were these guys doing? They were walking around in the fire. Their clothes are not burning and nobody is looking for an exit. If it were me I'd have been looking for an exit. They are walking around in the fire and when they come out you can't even smell smoke on them. When God does a miracle it is complete and full. It is not half way that needs a little bit of help.

Fourthly, there is a supernatural manifestation. When Nebuchadnezzar sees this he says, "There is only one God who can rescue people like this." So it is a supernatural manifestation but it has natural implications. All of Babylon were now changed. Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) get a promotion. They are about to catch up with Daniel now. They get another promotion and a decree goes out that the God of Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) is to be honored. So here is this supernatural manifestation with natural implications and influence all around.

The last thing about God's miraculous intervention is it has purpose. Notice how there is amazement of all. There is the admiration that comes from a pagan king. There is a change that takes place in a pagan culture. There is the placement and promotion of God's servants. There is the manifestation of the supremacy of God and the impotency of that image that Nebuchadnezzar had made. There is one more step in the progress and conversion of a pagan king and you will get to see it in the next study of Daniel 4.

So here is this work of the miraculous and God does the miracle on purpose and for a purpose. Everyone is amazed. A pagan king admires this God. There is a change in the pagan culture. There is the promotion and placement of God's servants. There is the declaration of the supremacy of God and the impotency of idols and there is one more step in the conversion of a pagan king that will be brought to fruition.

Here are a couple of takeaways in conclusion for you to be thinking about. One, a pagan culture will always bring a challenge to the conviction and character of God's

people. I am not prepared to tell you about one I think is coming right now but there is one that I have actually sought some advice on in things that are happening in our culture that is a challenge, at least for me personally as a servant of the Lord that I'm going to have to deal with. A pagan culture will always bring a challenge to the conviction and character of God's people.

Number two, the challenge of a pagan culture will always ultimately revolve around the issue of worship. A pagan culture will always attempt to attack Biblical God centered worship, either with secular worship or the worship of idols or false worship even in the church of the living God.

Number three, God will always deliver His people from the threats of the world and the intimidation of Satan for He alone is God and will do all things well. He may not do it with the miraculous but if not He will do it. He may do it just by allowing us to go home. Many, many more believers have been delivered through death into the presence of Jesus than rescued by a miracle in the last 2,000 years. God's purposes are sure. He knows that which is right and true. If He so desires miraculously, He will and can, but our God will call us to pass through the waters and to go through the fire. Fear not. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments that we have been able to spend together in Your Word. Thank You for Your grace and mercy that is abundant, glorious and free in Christ. Thank You that You are able to deliver. Now, O God, allow us not to search out battles but when the culture brings the battle whether it's worship or something else, allow us with the quiet confidence in the power of our God, with the assurance that our God does all things well, to stand true in Christ. Father, thank You for Jesus, Your Son, who far beyond Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego has come for Your glory. He would not be detracted by the temptations of Satan and the intimidation of Rome or the subterfuge of the religious people but I have come to do Your will, my Father and I delight in Your glory. Father help us to fix our eyes on this Jesus today that we might declare Your glory, worship and majesty, in the name of Him who has redeemed us and purchased us that we are His own. I pray this in Jesus' Name knowing the love of Christ casts out all fear, Amen.