

## WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Daniel 3:17-18

Life is a masterpiece, a mixture, or a mess. So is the assertion of Joseph Newton concerning all human experiences.

We are deciding daily exactly what it will be for us. The hour of decision is now - by choosing what is first in our lives, we determine what life brings to us.

This week in Roanoke, we had the privilege of hearing Manuel Scott. A Negro preacher from Los Angeles. And one day he prefaced his sermon with this statement - "I feel like a baseball pitcher on the mound." Some days he's got his stuff. Other days, he hasn't. And as a preacher, he said, he could never brag about what he had - or even after he had preached, what he had accomplished. Out of this conference there were two or three things that were evident.

First, laymen must assume more responsibility in witnessing for Jesus Christ in the world.

Second, the young people, high school aged youth - must begin sharing their witness with other youths.

Third, we have not outgrown the religion of the Bible. It is still the most important thing in the world of change in which we live. Too many people today think we are ready to discard our faith. Some feel we have outgrown it - just as we outgrow an old suit of clothes. And we dispose of it since it is no longer in style or useable. This attitude in the speeded up way of life, has given the idea that our faith has been out dated. When we think of the fictional story which was written back in 1863, Julius Verne, a french author

wrote five weeks in a balloon. In 1872, Around The World in 80 Days was published. Our grandfathers used to sit before the fireplaces and laugh, at how such stories which sprang from the imagination of some man's mind.

And then Willey Post turned the trick, flying around the world in 7 days. Now that record is outdated.

Let us go to the Old Testament - there are three young men who were faced with a changing world and a changing situation. And they said, if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us.

Now the experience of these three being cast in a burning firey furnace - 7 times hotter than it had ever been before. The son of God came to be with them - and this helps us to see what really is important.

First, as to their physical safety. These young men, no doubt, were as concerned about their physical safety as Christians today.

What must I do to be sure of life - here is an unmistakeable issue. Each of us must decide what he thinks is really important in the area of physical safety.

A few days ago on the Interstate, near Norview Avenue, a truck driver by the name of Godwin feared for the safety of a person driving a small car who cut in front of his big truck, and tried to miss that person. And was successful. But in doing so, his truck went out of control - and he lost both legs and an arm. And then, his life.

A man making an automobile trip in New York State had a severe wreck and the



driver was killed. A passenger in the car said that a bee had flown into the automobile in which they were riding. Fearing the bee might sting him, the driver attempted to brush the bee out of the car. And as he made an effort with his hand to do so, he lost control of the wheel - the car swerved and crashed and the driver died and others were injured. As you think about that, we can easily understand what happened. The bee was an undesireable hitch-hiker and an insect sting brings discomfort. But it is obvious that the pain from the sting of a bee would be preferred to the losing of a man's life.

A fire destroyed a theatre in a large city. The traveling performers shouted fire. One of the chorus girls temporarily escaped to safety. She rushed back into the burning building to get her suitcase. Now this was perhaps what she had collected over the years - just a suitcase filled with clothes. She lost her life, by risking it for a mere trifle.

We often make the same mistake, by over emphasizing speed on the highway. And this may mean that it will hasten us to the cemetery. Again and again, we must focus on the difference between the goods for life and life itself.

These three young men were mindful of their physical safety.

The second, their mental satisfaction. Our being able to discern what is important each day. In the time of crisis - the days are far more important than we realize. What we bring to them determines what they bring to us.

A man who was a baseball fan in 1954 when the Yankees lost the pennant - which was hard for some people to believe. That this team would ever do. The newspaper carried a story of a man in Florida, who was a devoted fan of the New York Yankees. His friends ribbed him about the downfall of the club. Hundreds of accounts of newspapers carried the story. His friends teased him.

And he was unable to handle the problem - and he took his own life. Certainly winning the ball game may be important to one's emotional satisfaction, to one's mental satisfaction.

Because Esau failed to understand how vital this choice was - and what really was important. When it was too late, he saw that he had acted foolishly. Any man who despises his birthright and is more interested in food - is hardly in a position to find mental satisfaction.

A man with keen insight often asks this question - if you were to receive a million dollars tomorrow, what would you do with it. Now this was his way of discovering what really comes first in a person's desire.

Larry Bronko wrote an article the other day on how do you get to sleep at night. Mrs. G. William Whitehurst, wife of the 2nd district congressman, said in an interview - my one habit is a long hot medicated bath at bedtime and I sleep well for three reasons. First, I have a deep and abiding faith in God. Second, I have a very happy marriage. And third, I have the satisfaction of having done a hard productive day's work.

Now I am sure those things that helped her to sleep - brought mental satisfaction. And a deep abiding faith in God, is certainly what these three men have. Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us.

Third, social security. Here is an area and a thought in life - if indeed we discover what truly is important. We shall learn the work of social security - with or without a number. All of us desire to feel confident. Whether we confess it or not. Indeed, a sense of security was in the minds of these three Hebrews. For us personally or for our social order, we must base our concern



for people everywhere. If we ever gain an adequate sense of safety, it will be necessary to appreciate and properly evaluate the home. We can be sure that if we abandon this institution, we have lost society.

A real estate dealer recently selling a man a new house caught a glimpse of this truth. The prospective buyer greeted him, I was born in a hospital. I went to school in college. I courted in an automobile. I was married in a church. I eat in a cafeteria. I go to the golf course in the mornings. Baseball games in the afternoon. And see plays at night. I expect to be buried from an undertaker's establishment. What I need is not a home - but a garage.

In contrast Grace Crowell, who was so indebted to her early home life, that she wrote an appreciation of the lovely picture on her mind. She remembers coming down a shadey street, happy and carefree. Eagerly anticipating seeing her mother.

Now this is not mere sentiment. But it suggests memories of all of us. Like this, as we grow older - it is the kind we leave.

An interesting illustration of General Pickett - when facing the Union Army outside of Richmond, the news of the birth of his new baby had reached him. The Confederate lines were lighted with bond-fires. For the soldiers were rejoicing with their general. The Union learned the explanation and sent word to General Grant's headquarters. That the Confederates were celebrating the birth of General Pickett's baby. By order of General Grant, fires were lighted in the Confederate lines to help the Confederates celebrate the birth of the child. And the next day Union officers sent a grateful letter through the lines under a flag of truce, bearing to General Pickett the congratulations from his enemies. In the note was words of gracious salutations.

And that story lights up a great truth. The love of the child, And if we could come to the place of the child born in Bethlehem - how fortunate it would be that people could learn that this is the important thing.

Fourth, spiritual safety. We are making up our minds now as to what we believe is spiritually important. It is not a question as to whether we should - we are compelled to decide. We must regard our faith or the lack of faith - as we call it salvation. Our confidence in God. These men said, our God, whom we serve is able to deliver us.

Roger Babson talked about this concerning the students coming from China. To get their education, as the young people mature, and become acquainted with our business men and our politicians act - they truly wonder if we are a Christian nation.

We know that our confidence in God is no fad - something that we will never outgrow.

General Booth had this in mind when he presented the story of his experiences in St. Louis, a number of years ago with a dramatic conclusion. He exclaimed, "This is what I did with my life - what are you doing with yours" ?

Dr. Ray Anderson, a Presbyterian, was having lunch one day with a congressman. He asked the political leader - what he considered the hope for civilization. The man replied, that religion, of course, is our one hope. Christianity offers us the way out. He went on to describe what he believed about spiritual resources. Dr. Anderson turned quietly to him and asked, "And do you attend the services of the church?" With embarrassment that was painfully disturbing. The congressman hurriedly tried to explain that he was so busy with political affairs



that he scarcely had time to worship on Sunday.

His first statement did not represent what he really thought was important. His deeds clearly did. Our lips may tell or fail to tell what is important. All of us constantly proclaim our belief with our lives.

Voltaire did not deny this when he refused to accept Christianity. A friend observed him take his hat off when the crucifix was carried past him during a religious procession. Turning to him, the friend remarked, I did not know that you were on speaking terms with God. The reply of Voltaire was -(we salute but we do not speak.) Far more than a salutation to God is necessary. If we are to ever understand what is vitally important in Christianity. These three men said, if our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from this fiery furnace. He will deliver us out of the hands of the King.

Now this ought to pinpoint each individual's experience. A young man in a Western city, with a dangerous life before him, who was assigned to the Sand Flats where the A-Bomb tests were being made. Six months earlier had united with the church. One day he stood with his pastor, and he pointed toward the front of the sanctuary where they could see the altar. And there was a cross. Almost in a whisper he said, there is our hope. The one thing of supreme importance. In years past we have expected evangelists and preachers to talk and make reference to the cross.

But now every individual must come and say what really is important. Because this question comes to all of us. Each of us must try to answer it. And it always involves an awareness of God.

J. C. Penney, America's great merchant, recently died at the age of 95. Leaving behind a 2.7 billion empire of retail stores. And with a chain of some 1700 stores or more, he says, I give all I can afford to give to God. His first store was called the "Golden Rule Store". And the name was changed later to J. C. Penney. His first business venture was the investment of \$2.50 in a pig - which he sold for a profit. He got a job at the age of 17 in a dry goods store, where he earned \$25 over an 11 months span. \$2.27 a month. And later his salary was increased to \$25.00. When he had \$300 in savings, he went into business. And the story of that man's life - proves what is important. "Keep your eyes on God. And trust Christ for divine leadership."

Leslie Weatherhead, refers sadly to an elderly gentlemen past 80, who asked him for a conference. The old man was frightened because of approaching death. The minister asked whether he had attended the services of the church. I have led a very busy life - I have not had time for that. Doing a little quick figuring, the minister realized that this man of 80 some years, had had plenty of time to give thought to this great spiritual truth. If he had used only Sundays - he would have had 4,000 such days with which to deal with matters of eternal consequence. By his own confession, I have not had time for that. He had been too busy for God.

There are those who had fortunately discovered, what is of supreme importance. They have not merely realized that God must be given priority.

William Rainey, one time President of Chicago University, and a famous Hebrew scholar - near the end of his life sent for his pastor and friend. And made one simple request - it was this. Sir, pray with me. Now I lay me down to sleep.



Jesus, himself, when he came to the conclusion of his earthly career, dying on a cross prayed, "Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit."

There is nothing more important for any of us today or for this world - than to give ourselves to God in complete sincerity. Father, into thy hands, I comment my spirit.

We read that the 3 Hebrew children who knew what was really important, walked in the midst of the fire, and had no hurt. Upon whose bodies, the fire had no power. Nor was a hair of their head singed - neither was their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. V. 27.

V. 29 - A decree was made - there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.