

June 17, 2012 - This I Know

We're starting a new series today and we've titled the series "This I know". I don't know if this commercial made it out to Saskatchewan, it's probably ten years now, but out in B.C. I remember this commercial came on for a number of years. It was for a news program on Global B.C. They came up with slogan that, at first glance, seemed to be a really great slogan. Their slogan was "No Sooner". I thought at first glance, "Well that's great", because they had the early morning news at 5:30 a.m. and they had the evening news that came on at 5:00 p.m. which was before all the other stations that came on at 6:00, and so I thought "That makes sense. That's a great slogan for you guys "No Sooner" because you're the channel that will tell people information they need, sooner than all the other channels, so they should tune in to you." At first I thought it was a great slogan, except, when I started to notice a pattern. Everywhere I saw this advertisement, whether it was on T.V., or on a billboard, or on a bus, for some inexplicable reason, they decided to highlight two letters in this slogan which totally changed the meaning of this slogan. They highlighted "N, O" so all I could see when I saw that slogan was "No Sooner" as in, our channel is no sooner than any other channel. And I thought "Why on earth would you highlight those two letters and just confuse the situation." We all want to know sooner. We all want to know first. We all want to be in the know.

A couple of weeks ago we were travelling through Ireland and we bravely or foolishly, decided to drive ourselves through Ireland. One of the essential things you need if you drive through Ireland is a GPS. We had got one with our rental car and were actually doing fairly well as we drove through Ireland, until one day, not long into our trip, we had stopped somewhere to view a castle and whatnot and we came back to our car and pressed the "On" button on our GPS, nothing happened. So, we did the smart thing, we pressed it again, and again, and again, and still nothing would happen, our GPS machine would not boot up. And so, in the middle of this city, it took us forever to find our way out because we didn't know where we were and we didn't know where we were supposed to go. If you have ever travelled there, you will remember that there are no street signs to tell you where you were going or where you should be. So, we didn't know where we were and without our GPS we were completely lost.

This week, Sawyer and I made a very, very quick visit out to B.C. because he had an appointment with his doctor there. When we got our car at the Vancouver they said "Do you need a GPS or do you need instructions to get anywhere?" And I said "No thank you. I know where I'm going." And that makes all the difference, doesn't it? When you know where you're going the journey makes quite a difference. Long before there was GPS there was this thing up in the sky called the North Star and I believe it is still there when you go out and look. When people were travelling in boats across the ocean and across the seas, what they would do at night is they would look up and try and find the North Star, because they knew if they could find the North Star they would know what direction is North. And if they could find that one point in the sky, then they would know how to continue on their way. We

are all looking for something so that we can “Know”. We are all looking for something that we can count on, to depend on, something we can trust in.

And so, over the next few weeks, we want to look at some of the things that God tells us and says “This you can know for certain.” So I hope you will join us as we go on that journey together.

There’s a book that came out quite a while ago. You may have seen it, it’s called “The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook”. Actually it was developed into a board game and one of those daily calendar things, but what this book did is, it would give you advice on how to handle some of your worst case scenario, scenarios. It would tell you things like “How to escape from a mountain lion” or the best way to do that. Or, “How to take a punch in the stomach” or maybe “How to survive an avalanche”. Or, one of my favourites, “How to escape a bad date” which, I read it, and it’s mostly about breaking windows and escaping that way. But it would give you advice on all of these worst case scenarios that you might encounter and how you can get out of them. Probably one of the most interesting ones was, there’s a whole chapter on “If your worst case scenario is, you go skydiving and your chute doesn’t open”. So basically the advice it gives you if your chute doesn’t open is you signal to your skydiving partner, which is great if you have a skydiving partner, and you tell him to come over and you’re supposed to lock arms and legs, which works great, unless your partner has already opened his chute and is now thousands of feet above you. If that happens, here’s plan “B”. Pull out your cell phone and tell your friends to gather quickly and assemble 18,000 cardboard boxes on the ground so that you can land safely, without injury. That’s what this guy, Garry Connery did just recently. He planned it a little farther ahead than that, but he managed to get down safely on those 18,000 cardboard boxes. Now, technically, I suppose that would work but I don’t think I’m quite ready to put all my eggs in that basket/case. Now, whatever my worst case scenario is, when it comes, I want my parachute to open and I want my backup chute to open and my auxiliary chute to open and my spare chute to open and I want to be tethered to another guy that has three chutes that are going to open and will go ahead and put those 18,000 boxes on the ground, just in case. You know, better yet, I would like to not have to face my worst case scenario, at all. Or even my second worst case scenario. I’d like to bypass all the troubles and trials. I’d like to skip all of the troubles and heartaches and heart brakes. I’d like to opt out of things like illness and grief. I’d like to avoid all of the shattered dreams and broken relationships, but life just doesn’t work that way, does it?

Sometimes we might wonder if God really loves us, why doesn’t He shelter us from all of these tough times. Unfortunately, as long as I am free to make my own decisions, I’m going to make some bad ones here and there and I’m going to have to go through some tough times as a result of that. As long as everyone else is free to make their choices, they’re going to make some bad ones here and there and I’m going to suffer some hard times because of their bad decisions. But what God does offer us, is this. Not the absence of bad times, but His constant presence to see us through those tough times. Matthew records Jesus’ final words

to his disciples when he says:

“And be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”

Jeff Vines states it like this: “If we are honest, that is the scenario most of us want. I want a life that never needs a parachute, however, the Biblical narrative seems to portray a different kind of God. Not a God that delivers us from trouble, but a God who delivers us through trouble.”

Perhaps one of the best examples of Bible story illustrating that comes from the Book of Daniel. There's actually a couple stories in the Book of Daniel that fit that mould very well. We're going to look at one this morning together. We're going to look at Daniel, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3. The first Chapter of Daniel revolves around one guy and his name is King Nebuchadnezzar the Second. Nebuchadnezzar was King of the Babylonian Empire. As King of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had spread his territory quite wide to include what is now, the modern Middle East. And outside the Bible, Nebuchadnezzar is most famous for creating the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Which is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. They were created somewhere in 600 B.C. and reportedly stood 80 feet tall. Now keep that number in your mind, if you would, we'll come back to that later. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon which were, by all reports, just fantastic and amazing to see, they are actually more terraced than hanging, but there is just this wonderful garden that Nebuchadnezzar had created in Babylon and that's what he's famous for outside the Bible. Inside the Bible, he's famous for something else altogether and we'll get to that in a minute.

He wasn't just known for constructing things, he was actually quite smart. You see, what Nebuchadnezzar would do, whenever he conquered another nation he would go and he would find the best and the brightest, the smartest young minds of that young nation and he would take them to Babylon with him and he would make them part of his advisory council. This was a brilliant plan for several reasons. First of all, everyone felt represented. Felt like they had a seat at the table because they knew that their best and brightest were up there advising Nebuchadnezzar, so they kind of felt like they had a part in things. It also made friends of his most likely enemies because when you think of who is going to start a revolt or a revolution, it's those young guys with all those great ideas and all the energy to carry it out, so we're going to take them and put them on our team and give them all of the best fruits of the empire and win them over that way. But even more than that, the best perk of this plan was that Nebuchadnezzar got the best advice possible, because he had all the smartest people advising him.

Among these advisors that he has there are four Jews that he has brought in to his advisory council. You may recognize some of these names, one was Daniel, and then the other three were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now, one day Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and it was a weird dream and it was a dream that stuck out to him and he sensed that there was something different and special about this dream. He had this dream and in this dream he

saw this statue and the statue had a gold head and a silver chest and then a bronze waist and feet that were kind of a mix of iron and clay. Then, this stone seemed to come out of nowhere and smashed the statue down. Nebuchadnezzar was puzzled by this and so he went to his wise men and said "I want you to interpret this dream that I've had". And so, his advisors said "Sure Nebuchadnezzar, we can do that. Tell us your dream and we'll tell you what it means. And Nebuchadnezzar says "I'm smart to you guys. If I tell you my dream, you can just make up anything you want, so here's how we're going to do it. I want you to tell me the dream and if you get that right, I want you to tell me what it means." And so they kind of hemmed and hawed for awhile, but the bottom line was, they said "Nebuchadnezzar, no man on earth can possibly do what you're asking us to do." And Nebuchadnezzar says "Well, that's what I want you to do, if you do it, I will give you great riches. If you don't do it, I will give you something much worse." And they said "Nebuchadnezzar, we want to do it but we just can't. No one could possibly do that." So Nebuchadnezzar says "Fine" and he sends out an order to kill all of his advisors, even the ones that weren't there that day. So the order goes out to kill all of his advisors, which happens to include Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and when someone comes to Daniel to carry out this order, Daniel says "Just wait a minute, I have a message for the King. Tell the King that no one can interpret his dream, no man could do it, but my God can." And so the King orders Daniel to come to him and Daniel comes before him and says "I can't tell you about your dream but the God of Heaven can decipher it for you and interpret it for you." And Nebuchadnezzar says "Go ahead". And so Daniel says "Okay here's what your dream was. You saw this statue, head of gold, arms of silver, etc. etc. and here's what it means. Your Kingdom is the head of gold but it's not going to last and after your kingdom is going to come another kingdom and that's represented by the arms of silver and after that kingdom will come another kingdom and after that another kingdom and so on and so on. Until we get to the feet of clay. And when we get to the feet of clay there is going to be a kingdom that is different than any other kingdom that anyone has ever experienced. A kingdom that is out of this World and it is going to come and it is going to cover the entire globe and it will last forever. And that's what your dream means Nebuchadnezzar. Now, the right question to ask after that is "What is this new Kingdom you are talking about? I need to know more about this new Kingdom?" But that's not the question Nebuchadnezzar asked. Instead the question he asked himself is this "How can I make sure that my kingdom lasts. That my kingdom isn't destroyed by these other kingdoms that I have seen in my dream?" So Nebuchadnezzar came up with a question that seemed entirely logical to him.

So, here's what the King did for Daniel. The King appointed Daniel to a high position and gave him many gifts. He made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon as well as Chief over all of his wise men. At Daniel's request, the King appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be in charge of all the affairs of the Province of Babylon while Daniel remained in the King's Court.

So things seemed to be going fairly well for these four young men in Nebuchadnezzar's Kingdom. So Nebuchadnezzar comes up with a solution that I believe was logical to him

and he said “Well here’s the problem. The problem is that I saw a statue in my dream that had a head of gold and then it had lesser metals all the way down to the feet of clay and that’s why it fell, that’s why it was destroyed, so what I need to do, the solution to this problem is, to make a statue that is gold from head to foot and then surely a gold statue from head to foot would last. So Nebuchadnezzar builds this gold statue to kind of try and edit his dream, if you would, and try and make his reality turn out. But the statue had more than just a symbolic purpose. We’re never told exactly what the statue looked like. It may have looked like Nebuchadnezzar, it may have looked like one of his patron gods, or it may have just looked like kind of a random looking, kind of statue. In that way, many commentators actually believe what Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do with this statue was to unite all of the Empire under one image. So he made it kind of a general image so that, whatever god you want to worship, you can come to this statue and say that this statue is my god and worship your god. So what he would do is, he sent out an edict and said “Whenever these instruments are played, I want everyone to bow down and worship the statue.” And he gave a wide range of instruments that were to be played. And again, there is symbolism in the instruments. He said “I want to play the horn” and the horn originated from the Middle East and places like Israel. “And I want somebody to play the flute”, which originated from Asia and Europe. “And I want somebody to play the Zither” which came from Africa and China and India. And the Lyre which came from Slovenia and Austria and Hungary. “And somebody should play the harp” which came from places like Iran and Syria and Israel and someone to play the pipes, and I heard one commentator say that was the bagpipes, but I think that’s more unlikely, it’s probably more like these which we would call a pan flute, which came from Greece. So, he gets this wide range of instruments and says “I want us to play all these different instruments so that when the instruments are played, whatever instrument you are used to hearing to call you to worship, you will hear that instrument and you will come to this idol and you can name it whatever you want, and bow down before it”. That was Nebuchadnezzar’s instructions. Whenever the music was played, everyone must bow.

Now, to fully appreciate this situation, we have to grasp what this statue was like. Now, it was said to be 90 feet tall. Ninety feet tall is a lot bigger than you think. It is nowhere close to what’s portrayed in this or most other pictures. Remember when I talked about the hanging gardens that is one of the Seven Wonders of the World, how tall were they? Eighty feet! This was ten feet higher than that. When I was on my travels in Turkey, we went to Ephesus and we saw the remains of a statue of the Emperor Domitian and this statue was said to be, when it was fully constructed, fifteen metres tall, which is 45 feet, which was half of what Nebuchadnezzar constructed. This picture really doesn’t do justice to get a sense of the scale of it you need to see this picture (???) and see how large that statue would have been compared to a normal person. And that’s just a half of it.

A few weeks ago, we talked about Goliath, who was a Philistine warrior who was over 9 feet tall. Now to give you a sense of scale, I wanted to find someone we could identify with to pair that up....and I thank you to all of you on Facebook who respond to my questions, not

knowing what I'm going to do with them, and so, here is the answer, I found someone I think we can all identify with, Ian. I'm told Ian is 6' 1". So, Ian compared to Goliath, is like that. Now that puts a little perspective in it for me. Now just to get a real visual sense of it, if Ian were standing up here, he would be about that tall, Goliath would be more like that. Goliath 9', Ian 6'. So, let's look at these guys in relation to the statue. There's Goliath, there's Ian, here is the statue. In fact, you would have about 15 Ian's standing on top of each other's head, to be the full height of this statue. Not only was this statue humongous, Nebuchadnezzar was smart about it and he placed it on the Plains of Dura. Which was located on the Euphrates River, which was one of the major waterways of that time and anyone travelling down that river would have to crouch under the shadow of this giant statue as it went by. And not only that, as it's name would indicate, Dura the Plains of Dura, are flat and they are flat for a long, long ways, which means that this giant 90 foot statue could be seen from far, far off. It also means, that when the music played and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't bow, there was no place for them to hide. There was no way they weren't going to be seen because everyone else was on the ground and they were just standing up there on the flat plains of Dura, all alone.

And so, that's what happened, the music played, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not bow down to the statue and Daniel said what happens next is....at this time some of the astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. The word for denounced there, is actually the word used for an animal devouring it's prey. You see, these were the guys who were in our story earlier who couldn't do what Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to do and then Daniel and his friends come waltzing in and all of a sudden they're the head of the Province of Babylon and these guys are on the outside. And so they see their opportunity and they see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who are not bowing to the idol and they dragged them before King Nebuchadnezzar and say, these guys do not do what you asked them to do. So Nebuchadnezzar says "I'll give you guys one more chance, if you don't bow, you are going to go into the fiery furnace, which is what the edict said from the beginning. And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood before the King and the King said "If you don't bow you will go into the furnace" and then he said "Who will save you then?" And when he asked that, it wasn't really a question. It's kind of one of those questions like "Do you want me to come down there?" or "Do you want me to call your father?" One of those kind questions. It's not really a question it's actually a threat. And so Nebuchadnezzar says "If you don't bow you're going into the fire and who will save you then?" Now, if this is the first time you've read this story, you may wonder what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will do. However, the truth is, they made their choice long before Nebuchadnezzar gave them that ultimatum. You see, they knew of the decree before they went to the Plains of Dura and knew the consequences of not bowing before they showed up there that day. They knew by not bowing when everyone else bowed it would be obvious that they weren't doing what the King demanded. They knew that there were those people who were just looking for an excuse to get back at these guys and to have them thrown into the fire. They knew the consequences of what they were about to do and they knew that the King would not likely back down. But they knew something else as well.

It says “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied “Oh Nebuchadnezzar! We don’t need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, your Majesty, but, even if He doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have set up.”

Mohamed Ali was once quoted as saying “The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses. Behind the lines in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.”

And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had won their fight LONG before they showed up on the Plains of Dura. Long before the music played and the people bowed. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s faith in God and their relationship with God, all the days leading up to this one, is what allowed them to stand before the King and stand before the firing squad and say “God is able to save us, and even if He doesn’t, we will still follow Him.” Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction is about what you would expect it to be, he was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual, then he ordered some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes and other garments. And because the King in his anger demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. So, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, securely tied into the roaring flames. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego believed that God could save them, but even if He didn’t rescue them from the fire, they believed He would be with them in the fire. And as it turns out, this time, God did both. As Nebuchadnezzar watched the fire blazing, he turned to his associates and said “Didn’t we throw three people into the fire?” And everyone says “Yes, Nebuchadnezzar, we threw three people into the fire.” And he said “I see four people in there and they’re not hurt and they’re walking around and they seem perfectly fine.”

God could have sent a mighty wind to blow out the flames. God could have sent a great flood to quench the fire. God could have coated Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s DNA with asbestos, but this time, God chose to be visibly present with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire. A tangible example of the truth that, when trouble comes, God hops in the fire and walks with us. When troubled times come, God walks with you. When you are stressed out, God shares your burden. When you are lonely, God sits with you. When you are sick, God holds your hand. When you are falsely accused, God stands up with you. When you cry yourself to sleep, God weeps with you. When relationships are fractured, God’s heart breaks with yours. When others turn their back on you, God sticks with you. When your poor choices have severe consequences, God does not give up on you. And sometimes we see Him clearly in the fire. Sometimes we can only see Him in hindsight.

Later on in the Book of Daniel, under a different king, Daniel himself gets thrown into a den

of hungry lions. And God shuts the mouths of the lions to protect Daniel but God is not visibly present there. Does that mean that Daniel was less important, or less spiritual or less loved by God than Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were? Of course not! But it also doesn't mean that God wasn't there. Because you see whether you see Him or not, whether you feel His presence, or not; whether times are good or troubled, God says "This you can know for certain, no matter what you are going through, I will be there with you."

Moses gives these words on God's behalf to the people of Israel, which are the words I will send you out with this morning. Deut. 31:6-8:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you, He will never leave you nor forsake you. The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged."