

Idolatry's Deliverance

Daniel 3:19-30

We are coming to our third and final message in Daniel 3 – a very hot chapter – under the heat of the pressures of idolatry. We will be addressing how God delivers not only His people from such a sin, and rescues them from such evil; but how the Lord also delivers idolaters over to the folly and judgment of idol-worship themselves. Here the three brave souls are rescued in and from the flames.

The Christian life is one of struggle and overcoming opposition. We are not called to a pilgrimage of leisure, but you must stand up to idolatry, you must walk and run against the flow, and you must be willing to face tribulation and affliction, even death, for the name of your Savior.

We have seen Idolatry's Demands and Idolatry's Denial, as these men refused to bow the knee, and trusted God whether He chose to rescue them or not. We will not bow to the silly or slick gods of men.

Today we see God's Deliverance.

We must say that this passage is out of step with much that is found in the modern and mostly western church. The idea that God's people will not suffer or be afflicted, will never have to face tribulation or persecution, is just blatantly wrong and contrary to both Scripture and experience. There has been a whole brand of false teaching called the "Pre-tribulation Rapture," which insists the church will not go through the great tribulation at the end of history, prior to the return of Jesus. God will rescue us from this period of time. They say the church cannot go through the tribulation.

But all throughout history we have seen God calling His people into the wilderness, to face the trials that have been specially visited upon them, to face death by the flame and by water, by sword and by rope.

We saw the faith and courage of these men in our last message. We saw how they properly, by the grace of God, diminished the foolish demands of a silly king unto sinful idolatry, and were willing to resist even to suffering, even to death, even death by fire, in order to be faithful.

We didn't see them saying things like, 'well, I am a child of God and should not have to suffer,' or 'the Lord promises me the best in life and not the worst, so I don't need to go through this test.'

This is all part of many, many lessons from this book, that we must resist evil in all of its forms: chapter 1 = abstaining from evil, not being tempted by the king's table; chapter 2 = answering evil, as the king demands his dream be interpreted; chapter 3 = opposing evil, even unto death.

Dear ones, you well know that these men are not the only ones who have had to stand before kings and the threat of roaring fires and refuse to bow the knee or give in to demands of law. Jan Hus was burnt to death a 100 years before the Reformation, by the hand of the Pope; Hooper, Latimer and Ridley, - all aged leaders of the church in England, were burned at the stake, but these bravely stood the test. Thomas Cranmer, at first denied the faith, when he was called on to die such a death as others all throughout Europe, in the Netherlands, in France, in England and Scotland. But when his recantation was not accepted, he found his courage again, and when he was brought to the flames, he first stuck his hand in it – the hand he called his treacherous member, which had signed that denial. Their burnt offering filled the countryside with the odious stench of wicked persecution, and at the same time, filled every nostril with the sweetness of a faith that could

not and would not be compromised. They followed in the train of these great men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Let us walk with them now as we come three points in this passage:

- 1. The Furnace of an Angry King** as the Ruler here goes crazy in his pride and wrath.
- 2. The Presence of the Divine King** as we see the Son of God walking with His people in the furnace of persecution.
- 3. The Gold of the Children of the King** as the Lord brings good out of evil, and blesses his own sons and daughters.

We begin with the furnace of the king's wrath, as the expression on his face changes in 19. The book of Proverbs speaks of the wrath of the king as being like the roaring of a lion, ferocious, and that is what we have here.

Yet it is an unrighteous and ungodly wrath, and so, as such anger often does, it turns out only to hurt himself. Anger is a firebrand that cannot be held without harm. It has a momentary pleasure about it, it brings some sort of an immediate release of satisfaction, for some reason. But in the end it only burns and hurts us.

The madness and folly of anger should especially be absent from those in authority. It is increased as an evil when it is found in those who lead: in parents, in teachers, in bosses, in policemen, in elders. This is part of mature self-control, and is highly prized with God, who says better is he that keeps his spirit than he who conquers a city. Is your spirit conquered by the grace and goodness of God?

So we see the furnace in the king's heart translated into the furnace being lit seven times hotter than normal. This seems to be figurative language – that the furnace was not exactly 7 times as hot, but that it was as hot as they could make it; the number 7 being the number of perfection, or completeness.

Of course all of this is irrational and senseless. He has threatened these men with death by fire already; what does this change? Will making it hotter killing them more?

These great smelting furnaces – which we have learned much about through archeology, gave off a loud noise as well as tremendous heat. Notice that the king had to shout above the roar of the flames.

The harm here however comes to his own people, his valiant or better, his strong men. Once again, the best efforts of sinful anger blows up in its own face.

Let us pause here before coming to the next point and consider the awful perversity and wickedness of this form of death. How evil to put someone to death by burning them alive! We touch our finger on a hot stove and how we pull back in immediate pain; what must it be like to burn all over?! What a remarkably, ghastly, horrid, wicked, monstrous act is this! This is an indescribable, speechless, abominable thing. The word for it is “holocaust”, a complete sacrifice by being consumed by fire, and rightly applied to the murder of millions of Jewish people by a deadly oven under the Nazis. That any human being would subject another to this, demonstrates the fallen nature of man. We are sinful and fallen race. This is one of the cruelest forms of punishment; thank God it has been banished for the most part in this world. We rightly have prevented this in our own nation, of any form of cruel or unusual punishment.

Why is this? Because God, and only God, may has the authority to use fire for judgment. He uses fire for judgment. How terrible the wrath of the true King, which is not arbitrary or irrational, but perfectly just, holy wrath. He will not spare, even when He sees how painful it is; He will not be moved by this; He will stand as a Rock to all eternity. He will not show mercy. And this is where all idolatry must come.

The three men were cast in with full court dress on, as though all that they have and are were to be included in this judgment. But where the king on earth dishonors, the King in heaven honors and protects His own. This brings us to our second and longest point.

The Saving Presence of the King, God's Son.

Here we find yet another surprising quality to this passage.

Nebuchadnezzar thought to separate these men from their Lord, by taking their life, but instead throws them into His very arms! The Lord, who permitted the king to cast them into the flame in the first place, is with them in the furnace. See here the perfection of the Lord's saving us **through** tribulation, and not around it.

1. First thing to learn from this event is that indeed the Lord does spare us much trouble in our lives. How many of us do you think will be brought to such a trial by fire? That is a mercy of God; He rescues us from many furnaces of affliction, from enemies, from the devil himself, and from ourselves, our own sin. But sometimes it is his good and perfect will to shepherd us through trouble and trial. He sometimes brings us into other forms of heated testing.

2. Secondly, it is better the Lord being with us in the furnace, than his absence outside of it, in our prosperity. That was the choice that faced these men: will I keep all that I am and have by falling before an idol and live like the world, or will I cling to my God who is with me now and forever? Now understand something basic: afflictions do not *automatically* bring the Lord's presence to us. This has been the mistake made throughout church history, believing that martyrdom automatically brought blessing and closeness to God. That is not true one bit. But, on the same hand, we do cry out more deeply, loudly, persistently, when the Lord uses His rod. CS Lewis observed that in our times of prosperity, God whispers; but He speaks to us with a megaphone in pain.

3. Notice thirdly that it is the "Son of God" who is with these afflicted men in the furnace. There is some discussion as to how this should be translated. But one thing is for certain: this is God with His people. This is not some god, this is not the son of Zeus or Osiris. This is no angel, but is no other than "Jesus", who in our greatest extremity, does not send angels, but is Himself with us, our Immanuel! Jehovah says in Isaiah 43: *But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!"² "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you."³ "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; (Isa 43:1-3 NAU)*

4. Now one more and best point must be highlighted: the Lord's perfect salvation in keeping His people in the flames. Those strong men were all destroyed on account of this loud fire, for they did not have the Lord. But these three are protected.

a. See how they are perfectly unharmed – nothing on them is burned at all, with the notable exception of the cords that tied their limbs!

b. See how they are perfectly freed - walking around with the greatest of ease: again, here is the true King shielding them while the angry king has to hold up his hand to view these four figures walking about in these very awful flames.

c. See they are perfectly kept – not only were they untouched by the flame; not only was their hair – so delicate to fire – not at all singed, or their eyebrows untouched; but not so much as a smell of the fire, not a whiff of it! Think about this! Our God saves us totally! He doesn't save part of us and not another, but our whole being is hidden with Christ in God. We are presented complete, without spot or wrinkle, before an all-holy throne! What fire are we saved from? Why

it is the wrath of God! As RC Sproul puts it in a striking way: God saves us from God! In short then, in a nutshell, as verse 27 says, it had NO POWER, or no effect! That is you in Jesus! The wicked one has no power over a singly hair of your head! No element of creation can be against you, if God the Son be for you! That is the kind of careful and entire redemption we have in the risen Savior!

Well that leads the blessings, or the fruit, or the fine gold that comes out of this furnace of affliction.

The Gold of the King's Children

Be reminded that your God refers to you as His gold, His silver. These precious metals need to be placed in the fire in order to remove the impure and cheaper metals, the dross.

Know that it is not by the gold being NEAR the fire that they are purified, but in it.

But at the same time, the Lord will not keep you in your afflictions a moment longer than is necessary, to bring forth your worth, your shine for all to see.

How does the silversmith know when the metal is pure? He can see his own image in it. So God is bringing out His own likeness in your life.

The first point we would make here is not the effect on the believer but on the unbeliever, not upon the Christians but upon the world.

1. See first of all, the **Astonishment in the Unbelievers** – Nebuchadnezzar is found stumbling over himself in praise to the God of the Hebrew. How opposite to what he said before in his pride – “what god then will save you?” to “your God is the God who is not to be opposed!” It does not seem warranted to see a conversion on the king's part, but this most high God of these men is added to the list of

approved gods in Babylon, and the worship of the Jews is officially recognized or sanctioned. Again, see how standing up in persecution brings religious liberty and protections. The king now sees that he was on the wrong side of this great God, and seeks to make amends.

2. Secondly, see here then the **Protections for Believers**. There was a saying in the early church when Nero was burning Christians and tossing them to the lions, and Rome came down with all of her weight upon the church, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. It was observed that for every believer that died on the floor of the coliseum, four or five in the crowd turned to Jesus as the living Lord. And so, not only did the church grow out of that bloody dirt, but so did freedom. Look at the Reformation, and what came out of the Protestants standing up to the tyranny of the Roman Catholics. The idea that you could force someone to believe or not believe the Bible was cast aside as the ugly rag that it was. And this very day – is it not atrocious that in the year 2017, this still goes on! People are put to death in Muslim nations for what they believe! Horrid! The gospel brings the rights of conscience to her liberty. There is a place here for a proper, humble, faithful, obedient **disobedience** which brings forth liberty in the earth.

3. One more application here is to see the **Promotion and esteem for godliness**; here is a pagan culture upholding, honoring, respecting, even reverencing the true religion. They don't embrace it; they don't believe it; they still reject it personally. But the truth has a way of winning opponents to tolerate and even protect freedom of the true religion. Proverbs says: *When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Pro 16:7)*

Perhaps why Christianity is so mocked and rejected in our nation today is because the ways of God's people are not pleasing to the Lord. We are too much like the unbeliever, living for ourselves, walking by sight and not faith. We are not willing to die for the honor

of Christ. And when the world sees this, we cannot hide from them our hypocrisy.

The chapter ends with these three prospering in Babylon. This is the last we hear of them in the book of Daniel, except that they are immortalized in Scripture and entered into the glorious hall of faith in Heb. 11, where it says: "They quenched the fury of the flames." They not only endured them, but they were as cool as water in overcoming the furnace by faith.

And yet what a remarkable event this is! What an effect did this power of God have upon this generation? What would Nebuchadnezzar think? How about the family of those strong men who lost their brother or husband or father? They were destroyed but these strange people from Israel were spared! Or what about these three?

A comedian tells about how awesome it would be to have been one of the dozen or so astronauts to have walked on the moon. No matter what story some other big mouth might boast about, your story always tops it! "I walked on the moon!"

These men walked in fire with Jesus! How they would talk about this day the rest of their lives; whenever they got together; when they were old men, they would tell their grandchildren again and again, until their eyes would roll!

Dear ones, go from this place with the same joy and resolve in your life.

You will not have to face such a death – God spares us greatly; but still, all the more, Paul writes, in the light of the resurrection of Christ and all His people: *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.* (1Co 15:58)

Oh Christian, if God saves you from sin, then hate even your garments to smell of the evil of this world; love holiness! The end of idolatry is the flames. Only those who truly worship God will be brought to glory. Exalt the glorious salvation of God bringing you through this hellish place! Keep all our garments of holiness by grace.

Lastly, know that all of our sufferings for Christ – small or great, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed; that these light afflictions work for you a most glorious reward! And you do not do this on your own: Christ will be with you, wheresoever you go. Take courage. He will give strength and help for your day.

I close with this illustration; there was a man Julius Palmer by name, who died during the Puritan persecution. After his body had been burned at the stake for the gospel he loved, and his friends came to claim his charred remains for the grave, thinking he was long dead, heard his lips breath out his last words; what did he say, after feeling a little of hell on earth? His final voice said: “Sweet - Jesus!”

Jesus will never, ever, ever leave you or forsake you.