

Daniel 3:19-30

In the Midst of the Furnace

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

20 And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *and cast them* into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here*." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.

27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

29 "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

Last year I remember posting the news that we were pregnant on a forum where I do internet apologetics, and then sadly later I had to post the news that we weren't anymore. I remember getting an email from an atheist on the forum saying, ***"I'm sorry but I have to ask - where is your God now? You are a Christian and a man of prayer, but apparently this God you believe in let you down"***

I wrote him back and I said,

"No, my God never let me down. You see Jesus never said that I wouldn't go through tribulation, in fact he told me I would. But what he also told me was that he would always be with me in the midst of that tribulation. And that he would never forsake me, and that no matter what happened His Grace would be sufficient for me. David didn't say to God ***"Thank you for keeping me out of the valley of the shadow of death"*** in Psalm 23, neither did he write, ***"thank you for eliminating all evil from my life."*** He wrote:

Psalm 23:4 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”

So you ask where my God is now? I answer *He is with Me yet, and he has told me that even these things that break my heart will be used for my good.*”

That truth is that even as I wrote that I was thinking, he won't understand what I mean. How can I really explain what it is to walk with Christ in the middle of the fire? Because of course the unbeliever being all alone in the midst of his tribulations, just wants to be delivered *from the fire*, whereas the Christian serves a God who does something far greater, ***he delivers his children in the midst of it***. But you will never, ever know what that is like until you have experienced it.

Psalm 34:6 This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.

8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

I can read those verses for you, explain them to you, but only the redeemed of the Lord know what it is to taste and see the Lord's goodness.

Now, it was because they were redeemed, and knew the goodness of the Lord, and were assured that that His goodness and His faithfulness towards them would never end that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to stand up before Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest man on earth and tell him to His face that they would not bow down to his image or serve his false gods even if it meant being thrown into the furnace.

As Matthew Henry puts it regarding their faith in God: ***“They trusted in him that he would stand by them in what they did, that he would either bring them out of the fiery furnace back to their place on earth or lead them through the fiery furnace forward to their place in heaven; and in this confidence they became fearless of the king's wrath and regardless of their own lives”***

Nebuchadnezzar of course was beyond furious at their defiance of his orders, the word tells us in verse 19 that his face changed, which is a poetic way of saying he blew his stack at that point. He is so angry that he rashly orders that the furnace be heated to 7 times its normal temperature. Just so you can imagine what was going on, the furnace being spoken of was probably either a stone or clay domelike or rectangular structure, it had a large opening at the bottom into which wood or charcoal was put, and then another opening at the top. The temperature of the furnace was increased by mean of a bellows which would force air in. They had to be pretty hot because they were used for smelting bronze or iron and you can imagine how hot they had to be in order to melt iron ore.

Well Nebuchadnezzar want the temperature of this one increased seven times past its normal working temperature, at that point flames would have been shooting out of the opening at the top, and I'm sure that the regular guards were scared silly at the idea of even approaching the furnace. So Nebuchadnezzar commands his bravest men, probably hand-picked members of his own bodyguard to carry them up to the top of the furnace and throw them in. The guards do, but the heat is so intense that the flames shooting out devour these mighty men, they are instantly killed and the three men they have carried up, fall down bound and helpless into the midst of the furnace.

The furious king has positioned his seat so he has a view into the furnace through the opening at the bottom. Nebuchadnezzar expects to be able to see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being totally consumed by the fire. But instead what he sees makes him leap up. ***“Didn’t we throw in three men, all tied up into the fire?”*** He asks. “True, o king” replies the court. Because now he sees that they are loosed and unharmed, in fact they are walking about in the furnace, and now there is someone else, whom Nebuchadnezzar describes as like the Son of God walking about with them.

Now you all know who that was in the furnace, with them don’t you? It was the same person who spoke to Moses from the midst of the burning bush. It was the same one who had promised his people one hundred years before in ***Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.***

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

You see brothers and sisters, there was a reason that Jesus said to Paul ***“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”*** in Acts 9:5. Christ is always with his people, throw them in the furnace, and He is there with them in the midst of it. ***I will be with you, he has promised. And that promise has never failed, nor will it.***

Nebuchadnezzar’s rage is gone, now all he can do is wonder, and he calls them out respectfully, and again they step out. The only thing that has been burned upon them are the bonds that held them, they have been entirely delivered by the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar that such a god who can deliver his people like this puts his own power to shame, and that none of the idols he worshipped could do any of this. And yet he is not a believer yet, he simply calls Jehovah, “Most High God” it will be a while yet before He is willing to confess him to be the only God.

But Nebuchadnezzar is awestruck by this display of power, so he promotes these three again, and He passes this edict, declaring that anyone who dares to speak against the God of these three men shall be destroyed along with his entire family, and this is probably to ensure that the Chaldeans or anyone else in the Babylonian government jealous of Daniel, Shadrach, and Abed-Nego does not attempt to use their religion to destroy them again. Clearly Nebuchadnezzar does not want to offend so powerful a God.

Now if I can make final applications:

1) First, the critical importance of not saying YES: If when they had been asked to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol they had said YES, think of how much Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have had to forego, they would have never have walked with the Son of God in the midst of the Furnace, not had that opportunity to know the Lord not only as their redeemer, but their refuge and strong tower! All they would have had instead was a guilty conscience, or worse the same seared conscience as their idolatrous countrymen in exile.

So many Christians today sadly do the same thing by saying “yes” to the threats and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and not only do they wound and deprive themselves, they damage their witness. Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t know what it was like to be with the Lord in the Midst of the Furnace, but he could see the witness of those three as they were. Unbelievers around you don’t know

what its like either, but what a witness you can be to be friends, to coworkers, to Doctors when you testify to the unfailing goodness of the Lord to you in the middle of the furnace.

2) **The Great SUSTAINING Comfort of knowing that God is with you, and that He is ordering all things to your good.**

At the GA I had the opportunity to talk to Pastor who is thinking of leaving the ministry. He has over the past year gone through a prolonged period of setbacks and darkness

I was able to share with him that the past 5 years have been the hardest of my life, the highest highs, the lowest lows. There have been times when I have been in the Furnace. Times when I have been tempted to do the wrong thing because it was easy. But through all of that, I have known what David knew, ***“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me”***

God preserved the life of the three in furnace because it was better for them to stay, that they might witness, and they yet had work to do in glorifying him. There have been times when I should have died, and the Lord has miraculously preserved my life [car difficulties] – why? Because there was yet work for *me* to do for Him. But a day will come, I know when the best for me will be to go home to be with him, so I can say truthfully with Job 13:15 ***Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.***

I know that for a believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. What can men do to me? None can rob me of my reward, or take away the presence of the Lord!

3) **Finally for those of you who don't know of the comfort I speak of, because you are not the redeemed of the Lord,** I would be no true physician of the soul if I did not warn you. I speak now as a dying man to dying men - Please understand that you do hang suspended as it were on a thin thread above a fire that Jesus said is never quenched and where you will never know his presence for all eternity. Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was terrifying, but what is that compared with hell? Let me close with Matthew Henry's solemn description of the difference:

“Let Nebuchadnezzar heat his furnace as hot as he can, a few minutes will finish the torment of those who are cast into it; but hell-fire tortures and does not kill. The pain of damned sinners is more exquisite, and the smoke of their torment ascends for ever and ever, and those have no rest, no intermission, no cessation of their pains, who have worshipped the beast and his image (Rev. xiv. 10, 11), whereas their pain would be soon over that were cast into this furnace for not worshipping this Babylonian beast and his image.”