

## **“THE FIERY FURNACE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Daniel 3.19-30**

### **Introduction.**

King Nebuchadnezzar ruled over the great Babylonian Empire. Under his leadership he had conquered and subjugated all the surrounding nations from Egypt in the west to Turkey in the north to Iran in the east. He was a ruthless and cruel tyrant. And his religion reflected his nature.

He had made a huge statue, a bronze image and in a vain attempt to unify his vast and diverse kingdom, commanded all peoples bow down and worship this idol. This is not some innocent religion, this is the tyranny of a despot king. No one had one ounce of interest in or love for this image. People had to be forced and threatened to bow down.

Who would dare to defy such a king and such an order? Who had that kind of death wish?

### **The obstinate obedience of three faithful followers of God, 17-18.**

**Daniel 3:17-18** 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. 18 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.”

You no doubt have heard testimonies of someone who refused to work on Sundays and got promoted. Someone started tithing all his profits and God doubly blessed him. A woman says she would not consider marrying someone how didn't love Jesus and God blessed her with a great Christian husband. No doubt there are true stories like that.

But what about the couple praying to have a baby that never comes or praying over a sick child who then dies, or the person who never marries, or the business that fails despite hard work and lots of prayer.

We don't worship God for what we can get from Him, not because we are rich or married or are parents or have a good life or good health. We worship Him regardless because of who He is and what He has already done for us.

There will always be furnaces, but there will not always be deliverances. The three men didn't doubt the ability of God to save them, they were careful not to be presumptions about God's will in the matter. In a real sense it was a win/win. God would be glorified either way, either by delivering them or by not being dishonored with idolatry.

## **When things get hot, bound and delivered into the flames, 19-23.**

Nebuchadnezzar was a man of his word. What he threatened was done and worse than first imagined. Notice the escalation that comes from uncontrolled rage, from wounded pride.

There is a side lesson here about our own fits of anger or rage, when we fly off the handle. Several times in Scripture we see anger that escalates beyond bounds or is misdirected or hurts the wrong victims or results in terrible mistakes.

Cain's anger at God kills Abel.

Joseph's ten brother's anger at him leads them to violence and hurting their father.

Jonah's anger at the withered plant which should have been directed at his own selfish concerns.

And what was the result of the Jew's anger with Jesus?

Finally consider the stored up hatred of humanity toward God and His Christ?

No wonder Jesus calls anger murder, and Paul warns of anger that leads to sin.

Physically enraged, the king demands their death by extreme means, and orders the flames to be made seven times hotter.

Certainly this fire would be no match for any other gods and scare them off. What god is there who can deliver someone from this kind of death? The advantage of these actions was that when the miracle occurs there will be no refuting that it was clearly a huge miracle. There is no room left for any other explanation. Every action of Nebuchadnezzar only worked to serve God's purpose and prove God's power all the more.

## **When kings get shocked, the great surprise, 24-25.**

Next comes the shock and awe. Nebuchadnezzar can't believe his eyes.

There are four men, not three.

They are unbound and walking around.

None of them are hurt in the slightest way.

The fourth has an appearance like a son of gods, like a divine being.

Think about the power going on inside that furnace at that moment. In the midst of a furnace raging at seven times its normal temperature there are fully clothed, unbound men walking and talking and not touched in any way by the flames all around them. What power is able to do that?

The God who made the fire, the God who controls even the effects of fire, the God who can burn in a burning bush and the bush not be touched.

There was way more power going in inside that furnace than out on the plains of Dura at that bronze image.

Who is the fourth man? Nebuchadnezzar calls this fourth person is divine, a son of gods, an angel sent by the gods. He considers this a heavenly being. It is certainly a physical manifestation of God's presence, one sent by God to pass through the fires with them. His presence is what saves them and delivers them.

**Psalm 91:11** For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

### **The preservation of the saints, the evidence, 26-27.**

The preservation of the saints is now recorded and there are many witnesses. No one tries to conceal the miracle the way the Pharisees did with Jesus and the resurrection.

The evidence of deliverance is carefully presented.

They are not hurt, no harm came to their bodies.

They walk out of the fire.

There was no sign of fire or burning on their bodies.

Their hair was not even singed.

Their clothes were not burned.

There was even no smell of fire on them, knowing that smoke penetrates everything.

When God saves, He saves completely, not just part way. This is a fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah two centuries earlier.

**Isaiah 43:2-3a** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.  
3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Fire and floods will come, tribulation will be our path. Our faith is a furnace faith, a faith made more real in the furnace, a faith that shines like gold refined in the furnace.

They were not kept from the fire, they were kept in the fire. God ensures that they are not overwhelmed in the trial, we can't be separated from His love by the trial.

**Romans 8:35, 37-38** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure ... [no]thing else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Hebrews 7:25** He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

## **The confession of the king, 28-30.**

The proud and cruel king for a moment at least acknowledges the truth concerning God. This is a miracle in itself, a king humbling himself and acknowledging he was wrong.

This is not so much a personal confession of faith in God but an acknowledgement that their God is a superior God. He is impressed, but not to the point of personal conviction.

Even calling God the Most High God is not an exclusive statement, just an acknowledgment that among the many Gods, their God is one of the supreme, sort of the way Zeus was supreme.

Just like the miracles of Jesus' day, they saw and believed but their hearts weren't changed. They worship with their lips but not their hearts. The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was not yet his God. The King did not say, "My Lord and my God."

There is a confession that saves and there is a confession that doesn't save. "Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). This confession is worthless, it is of no benefit to his soul.

He is singing God's praises, but his heart isn't changed. He praises them for trust their God and for not bowing down to idols, but makes no change in himself. His old idol was still standing on the plains of Dura. This is lip service, hypocrisy.

May our repentance and our obedience not be that incomplete or insincere?

Just think how hard it is to admit you are wrong to your spouse, your parents, your children, your boss, your employees, your friends. Think about how strong our pride is, how strong our defensive mechanisms.

Jesus always presents every human heart a choice, will it rebel in proud defiance or will it submit in humble obedience? How deeply committed are we to our money, power, influence, lusts, privileges, rights?

Jesus cuts people to the heart. Remember on Pentecost when Peter preached about Jesus, the people were cut to the heart.

Finally, Nebuchadnezzar shows how much he really doesn't get it. He had tried to decree religion before and now he tries again. True religion cannot be made through edicts or decrees or laws of kings. True religion is found only in the heart. The greatest commandment is the commandment to love God with all your heart. There is no other true religion apart from that.

## **Implications and Application.**

What is the application?

1. That if you are thrown into a fire, God will deliver you? That if you get in some deadly mess, you will walk out unscathed?

This is a real story of one way in which God acted on behalf of His people. It is an example, not a guarantee or an exact template. I can testify to numerous ways in which God has blessed and protected and intervened and delivered, and each one is special and unique, as are yours.

Don't wish for someone else's experience of God, or someone else's grace. In your life, in your circumstance, you trust God with all the faith in you. God puts on the lips of a cruel, pagan king what He would have each of us to do. In the face of even the worst trials, *trust God*. God delivers those who trust in Him.

But there is great comfort here of the kind of God we have and what He is powerfully able to do. He may not always deliver, but He is always with us. The fourth man is always with us.

In the furnace, in the flood, in the emergency room, in the operating room, in the funeral parlor, in the jail cell, in the waiting line, in the empty house, God is with us.

When a husband and a wife or a mom and dad gather together in a desperate prayer for help, there is a third in their midst. When two friends come together to intercede for an impossible situation, they are joined by a third. When eighteen council members offer prayers for the flock, there is a nineteenth unseen member there. When a church gathers for prayer there is another one in their midst. We are never alone.

God truly is our Immanuel God, the God who is with us. Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The fourth man is better than the twelfth man.

2. God gives us grace in our time of need.

**Psalm 66:10-12** For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

11 You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs;

12 you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;

yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

We will close with the hymn, *How Firm a Foundation*, which says in part:

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,

My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;

The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design

Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

"We cannot pray for the purification of the silver, and then despair when we begin to approach the furnace that removes the dross. The church in America is shot through with corruptions. If we want that corruption removed, then we must also want God's appointed instruments for

removing it. When God wants to reveal what cannot be shaken, He does so by shaking” (Doug Wilson).

Don't despise God's furnace. He is a consuming fire, but to those who trust Him, it only accomplishes good.

3. Finally, how is your life and faith different from those around you? What do you stand for that sets you apart? Do you have moral and ethical lines you will not cross no matter what the cost? What do you worship? Can you be intimidated into compromise?

The world worships and dances and sings to the sounds of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon and every other kind of music. The world falls down and worships every idol that comes along that pleases in some way. The world worships the power and glory of man in all its material manifestations.

Politicians bow down, common folks, the educated elite, the universities and big businesses, Apple, Google, Amazon, Target, they all bow to the idols of political and cultural correctness. One great unity on display while the music plays and the glory of man is worshiped.

It may seem like all the fun and joy and happiness is out there on the plains of Dura, where the music and dancing are, where the festival is taking place. Just like at the Golden Calf Aaron made so long ago. Such is the lie of Satan. Such is the deception of the devil.

Where was the true peace and joy and hope to be found on that day on the plains of Dura? With those who had their noses in the dirt in front of the bronze image, or those standing in the furnace?

Where do you find people like these three men today who refuse to worship anything or anyone else but God? Where are those who do not bow to other gods, who don't kowtow to the wishes of the state, who resist the states tyranny in moral matters?

These three men represent the church and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. This is the church faithful, the church triumphant, the church resistant against the idols and devils, saying no to ungodliness and worldly passions. The church has no great shining image, just a cross.

The rest of the Ten Commandments rests on the first, to break it is to break all the rest. The first command is the greatest, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Keep the first commandment even if it kills you.

Those who have a firm foundation laid in the Lord and in heaven above, will not tremble at anything in this life.