

“Into the Furnace”
Daniel 3:1-30
(Preached at Trinity, March 30, 2014)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I pointed out last time, **Daniel 3** contains the very familiar story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace.
2. The chapter opens with Nebuchadnezzar building a huge statue of gold. It was 90 feet tall. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s plan to usurp the plan and purposes of God. In his dream the statue was large and of extraordinary splendor but only the head of the statue was gold. The statue that Nebuchadnezzar has constructed is also extraordinary and it was constructed entirely of gold.
It was Nebuchadnezzar’s puny effort to establish for himself a permanent kingdom. In his mind it would unify his reign. He commanded all to bow before it.
3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found themselves in a horrible situation. On one hand they had always been respectful to the king. They had faithfully served him in all meekness and humility. But what he was asking of them now was impossible for them to obey. They knew the Law.
Exodus 20:4-5 NAU - "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.
⁵ "You shall not worship them or serve them"
4. You can imagine the building tension in their life. Living in a pagan culture would have always put them in difficult situations. It would have taken months for this pagan idol to have been constructed. Day after day they gazed at the abomination, uneasy about what it would mean. Perhaps there were rumors that all would be required to bow before it. Finally the decree was given:
Daniel 3:4-6 NAU - "Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every language*, ⁵ that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. ⁶ "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."
5. As the time drew near for the united act of worshipping the image Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew what they had to do. There had never been any doubt. Perhaps friends came to them trying to convince them that it was only a small thing. Perhaps other Jews told them that it was only a man-made statue. It meant nothing. If they bowed they could continue in service to the king and all would be well.
6. Finally, the moment came when they stood before the king and in great anger they were cast into the furnace.
And then the amazing happened. In the midst of this fiery trial they found that they were not alone! By faith they quenched the power of the fiery furnace.
Hebrews 11:33-34 NAU - "who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire"

I. The certainty of our fiery trials

- A. This is a subject that is given much space in Scripture. In fact there are few themes that are covered more frequently than the issue of Christian suffering tribulation.
1. Jesus spoke of it.
John 16:33 NAU - "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."
Matthew 5:11 NAU - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
 2. Paul taught continually that Christians should expect to suffer.
2 Timothy 3:12 NAU - "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
Acts 14:21-22 NAU - "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
 3. This is a major theme in the Book of Daniel – the persecution that God’s faithful people face. **Chapter 7** speaks of a beast that rises up to persecute the saints.
Daniel 7:25 NAU - "He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One"
- B. In the modern secularized church teaching about suffering seems rather foreign.
1. True Christianity has always been acquainted with suffering. We are living in a generation that is increasingly hostile to true Christianity. The media hates Christianity. Hollywood hates Christianity. The political elite hate Christianity. Higher education hates Christianity. Professing Christ in the future may be a costly commitment. Christians may find themselves frequently facing the fiery furnace.
 2. Peter stressed that persecution should never be seen as something unusual for the Christian
1 Peter 4:12 ESV - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."
 3. Suffering should be seen as the norm rather than the exception.
- C. You have to understand the transformation that characterizes the true believer
1. Regeneration or the new birth changes us. We have a disposition to love and honor Christ. His Law becomes our Law, His ways our ways.

2. This puts us in direct conflict with the unconverted. By nature all men hate Christ. And they will also hate the followers of Christ.

John 15:18-21 NAU - "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. ²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

- D. Christians must be resolute regarding who they will follow
For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego the answer was clear
As I stated before, their words in **Verse 17** were not some crazed fanaticism. They weren't even necessarily an expectation of supernatural deliverance. Their words simply reflected a resolute faith in God and determination to follow Him

II. The certainty of Christ's presence as we go through the fire.

- A. First, we can't overlook the miraculous protection of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Daniel 3:27 NAU - "the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them."

1. God supernaturally protected them
2. This doesn't mean God will always supernaturally come to our defense.
 - a. Many martyrs have been burned at the stake
 - b. There are thousands killed each year, even today
3. There is an economy of the miraculous in the Bible. In other words there were certain brief periods in Biblical history marked by extraordinary phenomena.
 - a. There was the period of Moses and the exodus
 - b. There was the period of Elijah and Elisha as the prophetic ministry was being established.
 - c. There was the period of Daniel and the time of the Exile and the great declaration of the sovereign reign of God over all the nations.
 - d. There was the period of Jesus and the Apostles
4. God is still able to do the miraculous but these times must rare today.
Our minds must be made up that we will serve Christ joyously even if He is pleased to send us through the fire

Daniel 3:17-18 NAU - "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But *even* if *He* does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

- B. The second thing we find is the comfort of God's presence as we go through the trial.
1. This was the comfort of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were resting upon God's special promise to His people in exile.
Isaiah 43:2-5 NAU - "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; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. ⁴ "Since you are precious in My sight, *Since* you are honored and I love you, I will give *other* men in your place and *other* peoples in exchange for your life. ⁵ "Do not fear, for I am with you. . . ."
 2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the superheated furnace. The king had every expectation of seeing them quickly consumed by the fire. But instead he saw them walking unscathed and with a fourth figure.
Daniel 3:24-25 NAU - "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!"
 3. The identity of this figure is not given. Only that he was "like a son of *the* gods"
 - a. The translation of the KJV is more of an interpretation than that of an accurate translation.
 Nebuchadnezzar did not have some revelation to refer to the fourth person as the Son of God.
 - b. In **Verse 28** Nebuchadnezzar referred to the fourth person as an angel. Whatever Nebuchadnezzar said, he surely saw this fourth person as a supernatural being – a son of the gods. It was one sent to walk with these three faithful saints in their fiery trial
 - c. I think we can find full justification in identifying this fourth person as a Christophany – a preincarnate appearance of Christ
 This was certainly the position of the early church
 4. There are other such appearances of Christ
 - The angel that appeared to Abraham in **Genesis 18**
 Abraham received them as men not knowing they were angels and demonstrated hospitality toward them. But one of them soon revealed Himself as God.
Genesis 18:10-14 NAU - "He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. ¹² Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" ¹³ And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a *child*, when I am so old?' ¹⁴ "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"

- Jacob wrestled with the angel that was more
Genesis 32:24-30 NAU - "Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved."
- Joshua saw the preincarnate Christ as the Lord of lords.
Joshua 5:13-15 NAU - "Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" ¹⁴ He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" ¹⁵ The captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so."

C. The Christian WILL go through fiery trials but he will also find the sweet comfort of the presence of Christ.

1. We are precious in His sight. We are His beloved bride.
 Jesus is our constant companion – He walks with us, talks with us
 “And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known.”
2. In Christ we are never alone
Matthew 28:20 – “I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world.”
Hebrews 13:5 NAS - "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"
 If we have Christ what else do we need?

Conclusion:

1. The comfort of God's people is that Christ is always with us. In Paul's dark hour when all men had forsaken him he found great comfort in the presence of Christ.
2 Timothy 4:16-18 NAU - "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen."
2. As our Good Shepherd He accompanies us through every dark season of life
Psalm 23:1 KJV - " Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. "
3. Jesus affirmed the promise of His presence before His ascension.
Matthew 28:20 NAU - "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
4. This is one of the great treasures of God's people. God will be with us. Whether you accept this to be a Christophany or not one thing cannot be denied. In the hour of their need God sent His presence to be with them. We are not promised that we will not go through trials. But we ARE promised His abiding presence.
Isaiah 43:2-3 NAU - "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
2 Corinthians 13:11 NAU - " Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."