

WHEN THE HEAT IS ON

Somewhere on the wall in each one of our homes is a little box. It contains a thermostat and a thermometer. What is the difference between them? The thermometer measures the temperature. The thermostat controls the temperature. The thermometer does not control anything, it simply reads the condition within the house. The thermostat does more than just read the temperature, it controls it. You set it for what you want and then it controls your furnace and air conditioner to change the environment around you. In this world, which are you? Are you like a thermometer? Are you simply reading and reflect the culture and the values of the world around you? Or are you a thermostat? Are you actively seeking to change the world around you to match the conditions God has given you?

Today we are continuing in our series called No Compromise looking at the life of Daniel. Today we come to the third chapter.

Daniel 3:1-6 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

This event happens some 15 years later. Daniel and his friends are now in their late 30s. King Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful ruler who struggled with pride and arrogance constantly. That is what caused the next test. In making this image he is saying that it is not enough just to be king. He wanted to be a god. This is the oldest temptation. The Bible says that Adam and Eve were told by Satan, you will be like god if you do what I tell you to do. Nebuchadnezzar set up this image and then demanded everyone to bow down before it.

Of course, this was something that Daniel and his friends could not do. The first commandment says 'you shall have no other gods before me.' The second commandment says 'you shall not bow down' before any idol. Because they could not do what the king commanded them to do, they were arrested and sentenced to be thrown into the furnace.

Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

We see that when these three men were threatened with death, they responded in the appropriate way by remembering 4 aspects of God's nature and character.

First, they affirm that God is with us. He is omnipresent. They tell the king "we do not need to defend ourselves before you." Why? Because God was with them and fighting for them. They did not have to defend themselves because they had someone who was with them defending them.

Second, they affirm that God is powerful. God is omnipotent. They tell the king “God is able to save us.” God has the resources to get us out of this mess. They affirm the fact that God is able.

Third, they affirm that God loves us. They tell the king “He will rescue us.” God is willing to save us because He loves us and wants what is best for us. He always has what is best for us in mind.

Fourth, they affirm that God is in control. God is sovereign. They tell the king “But even if he does not ... we will not serve your gods.” In other words, no matter what happens, we will still trust in Him. We believe that God is in control and therefore whatever happens is fine with us.

God is in control of our lives. That does not mean that He always acts in the way that we want Him to. Instead, He always acts in the way that is best. There are three different ways that God gets us through a crisis. The first is that God saves us FROM the crisis. He provides a heavenly detour and removes the problem in a miraculous way. This is always fun, but that is not the way God always works.

The second is that God saves us THROUGH the crisis. God does not remove the problem but He gives us the grace we need to walk through it. This is what happens in this story. They are not saved from the fire but they are saved through it by receiving the strength to endure it.

The third way is that God saves us BY the crisis. That means that ultimately God uses it to take you home to be with him forever. All of us will one day die. Even Lazarus, who Jesus miraculously raised from the dead eventually died. The issue is not IF we will die, simply WHEN.

Nebuchadnezzar was not pleased with the three friends and their faithful response so he acts;

Daniel 3:19-28 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

So what is it that we can learn from this story? How do we respond when we are going through the fires of suffering in our own lives? We learn 5 things;

1. God Will Stick With us

Just like the three friends affirmed beforehand, God was with them through it all. God is always with us. Over and over and over again God has promised his presence no matter what you go through if you will trust him. He says “I will be with you.”

As sure as God puts His children in the furnace, he will be in the furnace with them. -- Charles H Spurgeon

Daniel 3:24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." 25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

It was not a son of the gods that Nebuchadnezzar saw. It was Jesus, the son of God. Jesus was walking through the fire with them. And he has promised to walk through the fire with you too. Jesus said "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." He said in the Great Commission before he returned to heaven:

Matthew 28:20 ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Before Daniel, God had spoken through Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Notice again that this verse does not say IF, it says WHEN. There are times in our lives when we will go through trials. Like these three friends we will find ourselves in the fire. When this happens, the promise is that God will be with us.

A few years ago, I went to a conference in Vancouver. The speaker told this story. Years ago there was a man decided to write a book about churches across Canada. He started in Halifax and went into a large church. He was taking photographs and making notes when he noticed a golden telephone on the wall in the fellowship room with a sign above it that read \$10,000 per minute. Curious, he found the Pastor and questioned him about it. The Pastor told him it was a direct line to Heaven and if he pays the price he can talk to God. The man thanked the Pastor and left. As he moved West across the country he went to dozens of other churches and found more golden phones with the same signs and the same answers from the Pastor. Finally, he arrived in British Columbia. Upon entering a church in Victoria, he saw the usual golden telephone. But THIS time the sign above it read 35 cents per minute. Fascinated, he talked to the Pastor, telling about all the other golden phones he had seen in other churches in other cities, about how he had been told it was a direct line to Heaven and how he could talk to God for \$10,000 per minute, but here the charge was only 35 cents per minute. How can this be? The Pastor smiled and said "This is beautiful British Columbia ... for us it is a local call."

The truth is that God is always near, and prayer is always a local call. God is with us.

2. God Will Sever Things that Bind us

Notice again what this verse says,

Daniel 3:25 ...I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed

Nebuchadnezzar had commanded his strongest soldiers to bind the three friends before they were thrown into the fire. Now those bindings were gone, apparently burned away. Let me ask you a question this morning, what is binding you? What is holding you back from your calling? What is limiting you from being the person that God has called you to be? God wants to burn away those binding and free you today.

If God takes you through the fire, it is not just so that you come out the other side the same way you were before. The fire is there to purify you, to refine you. Remember that old song;

*Purify my heart, Let me be as gold and precious silver
Purify my heart, Let me be as gold, pure gold
Refiner's fire, My heart's one desire
Is to be holy, Set apart for You, Lord
I choose to be holy, Set apart for You, my Master
Ready to do Your will*

Pain never leaves you where it finds you. It helps us to mature. Have you ever seen in the movies where a person is wounded and they take fire and use it to cauterize the wound (me after the car accident). That is what fire does, it stops the bleeding. Sometimes in your life God has to stop the bleeding with a little fire. Not to hurt you, but to help you. That is why it is called *refining* fire.

When you refine silver and gold, you heat it up in order to rid of impurities. After it is melted at very high heat, the impurities are burned or skimmed off. If you ask a silversmith how he knows when the silver is pure, it is when he looks into container and he can see his own reflection. How do you know that God's refining fire has done its job in us? It is when Jesus looks at us and sees His reflection.

3. God Will Save us

Daniel 3:26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

I love this, the strongest soldiers bound them with the tightest cords. The furnace was so hot that the soldiers who threw them into the fire were burned to death, but they just walk out and not a hair on their head is burned, not even the smell of smoke. It's like they just got back from a Florida vacation.

That is the power of God. He is able to protect us, no matter what the enemy throws against us.

Psalms 23:4-5 Even 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

What do you do when you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, when your enemies are all around you? If you are with God, you pull out a table and have a nice lunch! You can do that because the power of God comforts you. With God we are not only unshakeable, we are unbakeable!

4. God Will Save Others Through us

Daniel 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

The way that God has worked in our lives is our testimony. It is our witness to God's great love and faithfulness. That testimony is powerful, it can help bring unbelievers to God.

How you handle pain in your life is probably your most powerful witness. I have seen this so many times with so many different people. They use their pain to point people to Christ. That is what happened in this story. The powerful but pagan king Nebuchadnezzar says, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego..." Because they trusted God, He was able to do a miracle in their lives that was witnessed by everyone around them.

Let me ask you another question this morning, what are you willing to die for? There are some things in life that are worth dying for.

Mark 8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

In botany there are some seeds that only sprout after a forest fire. Jack pinecones have the seeds in the cones but the resin on the cone is so tight they can't get out and they won't sprout. Only if there's a forest fire when that intense heat comes does the resin melt off that pinecone and the seeds drop out. They germinate and a whole new generation of jack pine trees grow.

It took the fire in the life of these three friends to bring Nebuchadnezzar to his knees.

Daniel 3:29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.

That statement was true then, and it is true today. There is no other god that can save. No matter what the fire, only Jesus is able to save you. No matter the best of intentions, only Jesus can remove our sin.

When we first moved to Kuwait Naomi did not like the little lizards that made their way into our house. One of our first nights there she saw a lizard and said I had to catch it and let it go outside. I got a broom and chased that lizard around the house for an hour. I finally was able to capture it unharmed. I walked over to the door holding the little thing in my hand. I opened the door and threw it into the bushes saying "there you go little guy, you are free." Before it hit the bush a wild cat that lived on the compound jumped out of no where and grabbed it and ate it before it hit the ground. Despite my best intentions, I could not save it. Or myself...

5. God Will Satisfy

The story ends with a simple statement:

Daniel 3:30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

God will reward our faith. He will use our faithfulness to make a difference in this world, and he will reward our faithfulness in the next.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

All of us are builders. God lets us decide how and with what materials we will build. The foundation is Jesus, it has already been laid. However, what we build on that foundation is up to us. We can be either focused on self like Nebuchadnezzar or we can be God focused like the three friends.

The story is told of a man on an African safari deep in the jungle. The guide before him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and thick underbrush. The traveler, wearied and hot, asked in frustration, "Where are we? Do you know where you are taking me? Where is the path?!" The seasoned guide stopped and looked back at the man and replied, "I am the path." We ask the same questions sometimes, don't we? We ask God, "Where are you taking me? Where is the path?" And he, like the guide, doesn't tell us. Oh, he may give us a hint or two, but that's all. If he did, would we understand? Would we comprehend our location? No, like the traveler, we are unacquainted with this jungle. So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself. Does he remove the jungle? No, the vegetation is still thick. Does he purge the predators? No, danger still lurks. His gift is His presence. His will is our path.

Jesus doesn't give hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he has promised to stay until the very end. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).