

The Testing of Your Faith

Daniel 3

There's a show on the history channel titled Forged in Fire. In the show, blade smiths compete to see who can recreate the best historical sharp-edged weapons. To recreate these bladed weapons, the blade smiths are given rough metal objects which they must fashion. But before they can begin shaping the metal objects into effective weapons, which will later be tested, they must first be heated in fire. The fire makes them fashionable in the hands of the blade smith.

Similarly, God uses fiery trials in our lives to fashion us. While seeking to encourage exiled believers in the Babylon of their day, the Apostle Peter wrote: *"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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed"* (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Unlike what the prosperity preachers teach, the Lord never promised that Christians will be exempt from trials and tribulation. On the contrary, the scriptures are clear that in this world we will suffer tribulation (John 16:33). As exiles in a world that is not our final home, we should not think it **strange** when we are ridiculed for our Christian values or experience hardship.

Rather we can *take heart* knowing that because God is **sovereign** over all things, the fiery trials that we go through are superintended by Him to **test us**. The fiery trials **prove** what we are made of. They not only **refine** our faith, but they **reveal** our hope in Christ before a watching world.

Main idea: Christians living in a Babylonian world are forged through *fiery trials* into holy instruments in the hands of God.

So, this morning we are going to consider three reasons that God uses fiery trials in our lives.

1. Fiery Trials Reveal Our Worship

First of all, fiery trials reveal our worship. Beginning in Daniel chapter 3 we read:

“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.³ Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:1-6).

Remember that back in chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that Daniel interpreted. That dream involved an image with a head of gold and other body parts made of different elements that represented the rise and fall of other kingdoms. Daniel specifically explained that the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream there was also a stone that was made without hands that crushed the image. Daniel explained that the stone that smashes all the other earthly kingdoms to dust, including Nebuchadnezzar’s, is a picture of the coming eternal kingdom of Jesus.

Now because Daniel not only interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but also knew what the dreamed **was** without Nebuchadnezzar telling him, the king accepted that Daniel was speaking truth. In fact, the king

acknowledged the authority of the God that Daniel served by saying: *“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery”* (Daniel 2:47).

But somehow between the events of chapter 2 and chapter 3 something flipped in the heart and mind of Nebuchadnezzar. As we read in verse one, Nebuchadnezzar came up with the idea of erecting a 90-foot image made entirely of gold and commanded that all the people upon hearing the specified music, were to bow down and worship the image that the king set up. Keep in mind that the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter two represented him. And that image with a head of gold, and other body parts, which represented others great kingdoms, was crushed by King Jesus, who Nebuchadnezzar would acknowledge was the God of gods and Lord of kings.

How many of you know, humans can be extremely stubborn, especially when they have power and authority? And sometimes in order for a lesson to stick they have to learn it the hard way. Well, that was Nebuchadnezzar. As one bible teacher explained: “Not only has he forgotten the lesson from the dream, he’s made it worse! The fact that [the image was] gold from top to bottom means he thinks his kingdom is going to last forever, and is the most important thing on earth. So, for Nebuchadnezzar, this is kind of a round 2 between him and God” (J.D. Greer).

Why did Nebuchadnezzar flip? Why did he go from acknowledging that the God that Daniel served was the God of gods, to erecting an image that represented himself or the gods that he served in direct opposition to his prophetic dream? Like many people in our day, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God, but he did not surrender to His Lordship. He gave Him lip service, but he did not give his heart to God in true worship.

Do you know that we were made to worship the one true God who created us in His image and likeness? But when we don’t worship Him in Spirit and in truth, we will seek a counterfeit god to worship in order

to fill the void. We will worship ourselves, we will create a god after our own image or imagination, or we will make idols out of material things. And when anything or anyone occupies the place in our hearts that only God can fill—when we worship the creature more than the creator, there is no limit to the depth of depravity man can fall into. The worship of self or other counterfeit gods will lead to rebellion against God’s creative order, which results in confusion and chaos, including what we see today as gender rebellion.

Because of the worship of self and other man-made gods not only are many today in rebellion against biblical values, but against what nature itself teaches us. Gender, for example, in the minds of many in our society is no longer conferred by the Creator, but is determined by an individual.

In his book, “The Church in Babylon” Erwin Lutzer writes: “God created only two sexes who are to complement each other in marital love, resulting in the development of families that populate this world (Genesis 1:26-27). If you are a man, you will always have male chromosomes; if you are a woman, you will always have female chromosomes. Every cell in the body is programmed to be male or female. Every person, no matter their sexual orientation, had both a mother and a father; they would not exist otherwise.

So, what exactly is gender rebellion? To put it simply, it’s an attempt to blur gender distinctions by saying that it’s not your physical anatomy that defines gender, but rather it’s what you feel or think you are. While the roots of gender rebellion are in atheistic evolution, it is being pushed to the forefront of today’s society through initiatives such as the feminist movement whose goal is “to reform or eliminate traditional gender roles.” This attempt to “reform” gender is destroying families and young people, and it affects us all. It is indeed a time to weep.”

Now in contrast to the self-worship of Neb, the 3 Hebrew youth, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego worshiped their Creator. And they didn’t just give lip service to God; they proved under the threat of being cast into a fiery furnace that only the God they served was worthy of their worship. And because they would not worship the

golden image that Neb set up with the rest of the crowd when prompted by the music, they stood out from the crowd (v.7). The crowd of thousands were bowing, but they were still standing. As a result, some in the crowd took notice of the 3 Hebrew young men and accused them before the King.

As a results we read beginning in verse 13: *“Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.”*

14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” (Daniel 3:13-15).

How many of you know, in this backward Babylonian society that we live in, there are certain gods we and our children will be pressured to bow too. And if we don't bow, we will be canceled or labeled a bigot. Erwin Lutzer writes: “There has been a change in the attitude of Americans toward the church, specifically toward Christians. There was a time when freedom of religion was simply assumed; today freedom of religion is being restricted, redefined, and otherwise compromised in deference to secular agendas.

This hostility to Christianity in the United States was largely unknown thirty or forty years ago. Today, we are accused of bigotry, hate, and intolerance for exposing the agenda of radical Islam or opposing various aspects of a sexualized society. In a bizarre twist, freedom of speech for Christians is openly condemned by those who see themselves as the bastions of tolerance, freedom, and love. It's difficult to even have a conversation with those who believe that to question their viewpoint on social issues is hateful, bigoted, and without merit. If we want to be known as good citizens, such people feel we should at least keep our “antiquated” views to ourselves.

Meanwhile, parents have to combat the LGBTQ agenda taught to their grade school children. A parent of a child in our Chicago public school told me that a teacher asked those who were in favor of same-sex marriage to line up on one side of the room, and those who were opposed were to line up on the other side of the room. The few who had the courage to line up in opposition to same-sex marriage were, in effect, shamed for their convictions. Many Christians feel embarrassed to defend traditional marriage and a reasonable understanding of gender. Like a deer caught in the headlights, we don't quite know what to do and whether we are willing to pay the price of our fidelity to Scripture. We are shamed into silence.

To summarize the late Haddon Robinson: In the past we, as American Christians, always had home-field advantage. We knew that in the crowd, there were those from the other team who were opposed to us, but the larger stadium crowd was either on our side or indifferent to our witness as Christians. All that has changed. Now we play all of our games on enemy turf. A minority is on our side, but the wider culture sits in the stands shouting hateful epithets at us, rejoicing at our losses" (The Church in Babylon Erwin W. Lutzer).

Now although in our American society we are unlikely to face imprisonment or death for not going along with the crowd, we still have to deal with pressures to conform or compromise our convictions. We often face pressure to put God in second place in order to go after the gods of money and materialism. Has your faith been put to the test? If it's not been put to the test, perhaps it's because you've already subtly conformed to this world and are going along just to get along.

While facing the wrath of the Babylonian king for not bowing with the crowd to the golden image that he set up, we read beginning in verse 16: "*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ 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” (Daniel 3:1-18).

It’s easy to declare our allegiance to God in church among other professing Christians. Yes, it’s important that we gather together to strengthen one another in the Lord. But the true test of our faith and what we truly worship comes not when we are among people that agree with us, but when we are among people that disagree with us—the true test comes when our devotion to God comes with a price.

The three Hebrew youth believed with all their hearts that the God whom they served was able to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace. In fact, not only did they declare to the king their faith in God’s ability to deliver them, but they had confidence that he would deliver them.

When I was battling terminal cancer, God placed a praying man in my life who was confident that God was going to bring me through. But his confidence wasn’t based on bad theology, like the word or faith theology or the health and wealth gospel. His confidence was not based on faith in his faith or in his positive confessions. His confidence was in God’s ability. And as he sought God in prayer on my behalf, along with many others, I believe that God gave him a special grace that made him confident that God was going to bring me through. But besides trusting God’s ability to bring me through that fiery trial, this faithful brother trusted God’s character and sovereignty even more.

Likewise, the 3 Hebrew youth trusted that the God they served and that allowed them to be in the predicament they were in, was able to deliver them. But these young men didn’t just trust in God’s ability, they trusted God’s character, God’s wisdom, and God’s sovereignty. Therefore, they added to their declaration of faith in God’s power to deliver them these profound words: *“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” (Daniel 3:18).*

Note that their faith in God was demonstrated not just in believing that God was able to deliver them, but moreover in that even if He didn’t,

they would maintain their devotion to God even if it cost them their lives. When your faith is put to the test, what does it reveal about what you truly believe about God? When the faith of the 3 youth was put to the test, it revealed that they served God not only for what He could do for them, but for who He is.

This brings us to a second reason that God uses fiery trials in the lives of His children.

2. Fiery Trials Refine Our Walk

In addition to revealing our worship, fiery trials refine our walk. After declaring their faith in God under the threat of being thrown into the fiery furnace, we read beginning in verse 19: *“Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, [e] their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²² Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” ²⁵ He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:19-25).*

Notice that after casting the 3-bound youth into the furnace that was so hot that it killed the soldiers that threw them into it, moments later *Nebuchadnezzar* was blown away. When he looked into the furnace he couldn't believe his eyes. Not only were the 3-youth still alive and walking around in the furnace unbound, but he could see a fourth

person whose appearance, he said, was like a son of the gods. Who was that fourth person?

Some bible commentators suggest that the fourth person was a physical appearance of Jesus before his incarnation. Others suggest that it could have been an angel. Although I lean towards the fourth man being a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, we can't say for certain. But what we can say is that the fourth person is a demonstration of God's presence with His children in their time of testing and trials. As one commentator noted: "God did not simply rescue his servants from the fire, he sent his personal emissary to pass through the fire with them, a presence that takes richer dimensions in the New Testaments, when God *the son* comes to dwell physically with us as Immanuel." (Iain Duguid).

And because God the son took on flesh to ultimately give His life as a ransom for many, all who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior become a temple of the Holy Spirit. As we walk through the trials of this life, we can trust, as servants of the Most High God, that His presence within will not only enable us to endure hardship, but that God will use fiery trials to refine our faith and transform us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. God is not only able to deliver us from the fire, but He delivers us through the fire.

The 3 Hebrew youth went into the fire bound, but they came out of the fire unbound. When we trust God's sovereignty to deliver us through the fire and not just His ability to deliver us from the fire, we can emerge with greater faith in God and greater likeness to Jesus.

God never promised believers the absence of problems, but He did promise that His presence will be with us in our fiery trials. And when we lean hard on Jesus and the eternal hope that we have in Christ in our trials, like Neb, people around us will see another person—Jesus in the fire with us and glorify His name.

This brings us to a final reason God uses fiery trials in the lives of His children.

3. Fiery Trials revive/reinforce our witness

Fiery trials not only reveal our worship and refine our walk, they also revive our witness. After observing the 3 Hebrew youth walking around in the fiery furnace unbound and unharmed with a fourth person that he recognized as a divine being, we read beginning in verse 26:

“Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside^[1] the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.” Daniel 3:26-30

Notice that in verse 28 we learn that not even a hair on the heads of the 3 youth was singed by the fire and that they didn't even smell like smoke. But what impressed Nebuchadnezzar even more was their devotion to God. After they emerged from the fire, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed, *“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God”* (Daniel 3:29). The worth and value of God was seen in the lives of these youth not only in their deliverance from the fire, but in their willingness to go in the fire to stay true to their God.

What about us? Is our devotion to God making a notable difference in our lives before a watching world—before people in our lives who don't know the God that we serve? Do we only serve God when it's convenient or are we willing to be inconvenienced or even suffer ridicule or loss to maintain our devotion to God, to serve His people and spread the good news of Jesus in the world?

Where is this hope found that enables us to remain faithful under fire? It's found when we look to Jesus who in His incarnation was under fire for us, who entered into the furnace of judgement for our sin so that we can have hope in this life and in the end emerge safely from our time in the furnace of Babylon. And this hope is seen in us not only when we trust God's ability to deliver us from the fire, but even more so when we stay faithful to God when our faith is under fire—when our faith is put to the test.

And as Peter wrote in his letter to exiled believers in a Babylonian world in 1 Peter 3:15, when people see the difference that only "Christ with us" can make in our lives, especially under fire, their hearts will be opened to the message of Christ—they will ask us for a reason for the hope that is in us, which we are called to share with gentleness and respect.

Conclusion

There will be times when we will wonder, "God, where are you in this? I thought you called me to retire early to be a full time Pastor. But in the last seven years after retiring I've been diagnosed with cancer twice." It's easy to trust God in times of prosperity, or when you see Him clearly opening doors. He's opened so many doors in my life in ways that were unquestionably the hand of God. But will we trust Him when a door closes? When there doesn't seem to be a human solution to a problem, will we walk by faith or will we only walk by sight?

Because on the cross Jesus absorbed the fire of judgement on our behalf, and three days later walked out of a borrowed tomb, as believers, we can trust that His silence doesn't mean His absence.

He's with us in the fire. The cross and resurrection of Jesus tells me that I can trust God to deliver me when my back is up against a wall. When I was diagnosed with terminal cancer the second time, a dear sister sent me a card that said, "God gave you this mountain to show you that He can move it" and He did.

As servants of the most High God, we can trust Him to move mountains. But even if He doesn't, we can still trust that He knows what He's doing—that He's working all things for good. When we can't understand His hand, the cross tells us that we can trust His heart. Even when we can't see the way forward, we can declare as Job did, "*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold*" (Job 23:8-10). We will emerge from the furnace safe and secure when it's all said and done.