*Feeling the Heat: Trusting God in the Midst of the Fire*

*Daniel 3:19-25*

Good morning! Please refer to your bulletin to our Scripture of study for today. We are continuing our study of the book of Daniel. We are at the part of the account where Daniel’s three friends have been told that if they do not bow down to the image created by King Nebuchadnezzar they would be thrown into the fiery furnace. In the previous message we already saw their reply. No matter what the king threatens to do to them, they will not bow down to the image. The faith of these men is very strong and now that faith will be tested. What we will learn today is that God walks through the trials of life with those who trust Him and that He understand what we are facing. Our God not only understands, but He provides ways, in His own miraculous ways, to help us endure those trials. Today will be part 1 of a 2-part message as we unwrap the lessons learned from the episode with the furnace. Read with me Daniel 3:19-25.

**19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 And he ordered certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in order to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps, and their other clothes, and were thrown into the middle of the furnace of blazing fire. 22 For this reason, because the king’s command was harsh and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell into the middle of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.**

**24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up quickly; he said to his counselors, “Was it not three men that we threw bound into the middle of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Absolutely, O king.” 25 He responded, “Look! I see four men untied and walking about in the middle of the fire unharmed, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!”**

**I. Introduction: Facing the Fire of Life (vv. 19-20)**

**Context**: King Nebuchadnezzar’s decree and the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship the golden image. Why was the king so angry? In vv. 17-18 of chapter three, the men tell the king that no matter what he does to them they will not bow down to worship the image he had made. Nobody was allowed to say “No” to King Nebuchadnezzar and this was a challenge to his authority. He was not going to take this kind of insolence from his servants.

**Illustration**: Life often presents "fiery furnaces" in various forms: suffering, persecution, and trials. These moments test our faith in God. We are told several times in Scripture that persecution as a follow of Christ is to be expected as well as embraced. At the Last Supper Jesus warned the disciples that they would be persecuted because of their faith in Him. In John 15:20 Jesus says **“’Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow your also.’”** Not only did Jesus warn them that this was to be expected, but both Apostles Paul and James tell us that persecution is a good thing. In Romans 5:3-5 Paul writes these words regarding persecution “And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**Point**: Just as the three Hebrews faced an intense, literal fire, we too will face trials that test our loyalty and faith. What we need to remember as we live this life as a follower of Christ is that we are not promised that we will have a life free from obstacles and trials. Scripture teaches us the opposite and we need to have this proper perspective in mind as we continue in this passage. When we began our study of the Epistle of James, we read in chapter 1:2-4 **“2 Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** Trials are not used to make us miserable, but they are used to equip us to increase our faith. The trial that these men are about to face will bring glory to God as well as strengthen their faith as well as the other Hebrews that are in exile in Babylon.

**II. The Intensity of the Trial (vv. 19-23)**

1. **The King’s Anger and the Furnace’s Heat (vv. 19-20)**:

Nebuchadnezzar’s fury leads to a seven times hotter furnace. As we stated earlier, the king was furious with these men because he had promoted them into positions of honor in the kingdom and they were not showing gratitude. In the king’s eyes he was just asking them to bow down to the image as a way to thank him for what he had done for them. In verse 19 we see the phrase that the king’s “facial expression was changed toward” the three men. In other words, he no longer looked at them in the same way he had previously. Sometimes in our lives we have situations arise when someone says or does something that makes us change our view towards them and we never see them the same again. This can either be positive or negative. Therefore, the king is not looking at these men the same again and this will impact the way he responds to the situation.

**Application**: Trials can sometimes seem intensified, and the pressure can feel unbearable, but God is aware of the intensity. With the king making the fire seven times hotter these men were not just facing the punishment the king had decreed that those who refused to cooperate would face, but this was a more intense punishment due to the personal betrayal the king felt from these men. Regardless of how intense this trial felt to the men, what we learn is that God knows what they are facing and He actually goes through the trial with them. King David, when he was a young man, wrote in the 23rd Psalm his belief in that fact. **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (verse 4).** You and I do not have to fear the trials we face because we do not face them alone. If our God was willing to face betrayal, suffering and a horrible death alone we can face the tough times with confidence because we are not going through it alone.

1. **The Faith of the Three Hebrews (vv. 21-23)**:

They were bound and thrown into the furnace. We are told in verse 21 that these men were bound, and with all of their clothing still on them were thrown into the furnace. These details turn out to be very important as we continue in the account. We will come back to these as we conclude this story next week. Then we are given in verse 22 another very important detail to help us understand the severity of the situation. When the door was opened to throw the men into the furnace, we are told that the flames were so strong that the men who put them in were killed. This informs us that the flames were to a point where no human would be able to survive it. The text is very clear that this was not just a warm furnace, it was a scorching fire that would consume anything that came into contact with it. In verse 23 the men fall into the furnace and they are in the midst of the fire. At the end of the verse, it tells us that the men were still tied up. We already see that the men are being protected since they were not killed immediately like the guards. God is already at work in this situation.

**Application**: Despite the peril, the three men stand firm in their faith. We are called to trust God even when we don’t know how He will deliver us. They did not allow the severity of the situation to deter them from their faith. This provides us a good example of how we can approach trials in our own lives. One of the most unique aspects of trials are that they are not predictable meaning that we do not always know how severe they will be or in what way God will act in that situation. Let us take a moment to revisit a verse we discussed the last time we were in Daniel last month. In verses 17-18 the men say that they will not comply with the king’s demand regardless of how God responds. There are two ways that God can respond to the trials in our lives. Firstly, He can choose to become directly involved and deliver us from the trial or He can choose to allow us to face the trial but stay with us as we go through it. Either way He chooses to respond, we are taught in Scripture that God knows what we are facing and walks by our side as we face it. The men in this situation show they trust in God and will accept His judgment. We must do the same because God is all-knowing and trustworthy, so we can trust that He will do what is right. Moses confirms this truth in his final instructions to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:4 **“The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and just is He.”** Moses was saying this as the people were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years and after God had decreed that he would not be entering the Promised Land. He understood that God always acts appropriately because He is pure, holy and omnipotent. If Moses trusted God after his struggles, shouldn’t you and I do so as well?

**III. God’s Presence in the Furnace (vv. 24-25)**

1. **The King's Astonishment (v. 24)**:

Nebuchadnezzar is surprised to see not three, but four figures in the fire. The king thinks that he is having a hallucination because the first thing that he asks his counselors is to verify that they put three men into the furnace. He gets verification, so now he knows that he is not hallucinating.

**Application**: God doesn’t abandon us in the midst of our trials. He is present with us in the fire, and His presence brings protection and peace. As we have been discussing through the season of advent, when Jesus Christ arrived as a baby this was God coming to be in the presence of His people. The prophet Isaiah gave the Messiah the title of Immanuel, which means God with us. When God spoke through the prophet telling the people about the coming of the Messiah, He told the people that this is the way He would be walking through the trials of life with them. In Isaiah 43:2 the prophet shares these words of comfort with the people **“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.”** These words fit perfectly with our account in Scripture today. Our God not only tells us that we will face trials, but He also assures us that He will walk through those with us. Jesus Christ facing trials in His own life show us physical evidence of this promise that we can take with assurance and confidence.

1. **The Fourth Figure (v. 25)**:

The fourth figure is described as "like a son of the gods"—a divine presence with them. This description of the fourth figure leads to the belief that this was a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. There were other times in the OT where there were physical appearances of God as a human being. One such example was when the three visitors came to see Abraham before they went to Sodom to destroy it. This is provided for us in Genesis 18. Another time was when Joshua was visited by the Commander of the Lord’s army in Joshua chapter 6. Based upon the text it is appropriate to come to the conclusion that this was Jesus Christ, but we do not know for certain. God being with the men in the furnace shows us that He not only supported them in His words, but His actions also showed His care and concern for these men.

**Application**: God’s presence in our trials reassures us. He is with us, often in ways we cannot understand, but always in ways that provide for our benefit. When we think about how God walks through our trials with us it can also bring us peace because we know that His acts are righteous and that He is always knows how much we can take. The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the church in Corinth tells them **“No temptation has overtaken you except something common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).** God knows what we can bear and He will walk through that temptation with us so that we will be able endure it. The same can be said regarding trials and suffering. God knows what we can bear and He will be with us through it and help us endure.

**IV. Key Takeaways:**

* **God is with us in our trials**: Just as He was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, He is with us through every trial.
* **Trusting God doesn't guarantee an easy life**, but it does guarantee His presence and eventual deliverance.
* **Our faith can become a testimony**: Others witness our trust in God and can see His power through us.

**V. Conclusion: How Will We Respond in the Fire?**

**Challenge**:

When facing trials, will we trust God completely, knowing that He is with us in the fire? This is the same testing of our faith that these men experienced in the furnace. What does it mean to trust God completely? This means that we need to do what we know is right in our lives and trust God with the results. We should not worry about what will happen because as long as we are walking in God’s way, He will sustain us in the fire. This is not easy to do, but we are promised that if we do God knows all and will help us to endure the trial.