

Another In The Fire

So hey there, good to see you and to have you with us. If you are new watching online thanks for giving us a shot and taking a chance on us with your weekend time. We hope that you really do bump into God in your time here with us this weekend and that you want come back and do this all over again with us real soon.

We are going to be continuing my 2 week message series that I started last week called "Faith In The Fire": My title this morning is called Another in the fire

Here's what we are jumping into. So God's chosen people Israel are in captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar has a golden idol made and issues an order that everyone in Babylon will bow down and worship it. Three Jewish young men Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to do that so they are brought before the king. He says something to the effect of obviously you didn't hear what I was saying and repeats his order to them. He ends with this, if you don't you will be thrown into a blazing furnace. So let's pick the story up there with their response. Here we go Daniel chapter 3 beginning with verse 16...

Our text for today allows us to see God working in the lives of his people bringing salvation to them in the midst of the "heat" and pressures of life. And while we would all agree that this is the purpose of our faith and could draw a pretty good lesson from this fact for our lives, I don't want us to just leave it there.

I have been particularly impressed by this passage lately.

Sometimes God takes a text and brings new light to it when you are reading it at different times in your life... Anyway, this is another of those Old Stories that is familiar to those of us who grew up in Sunday school... you may even remember singing songs about Daniel in the Lion's den and three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace.

So this story, perhaps more than many others is rooted deeply in our being from an early age.

We almost always focus in this story upon the fact that God sustained the Hebrew children throughout this ordeal by being with them in the fire. Rewarding them for their faithfulness....as we should!

So, there are all kinds of options available to God here after all He's God.

Why this? I think that he needs us to see this. Yes, I can fix this, I can make the problem go away from a distance but I prefer to jump right into the middle of the mess, the middle of the hurt and pain with you. If you think about that it's exactly what he did when he sent Jesus to rescue us. Yes, God could change their circumstances but He decides that what's

best is for them (as as we will see...his kingdom) is for Him to be in the midst of the circumstances with them.

Sometimes God doesn't put the fire out, instead he teaches us to dance in the middle of it like these 3 men in the story. Richard Rohr says this. "Until we are led to the limits of our present game plan, and find it to be insufficient, we will not search out or find the real source, the deep well, or the constantly flowing stream."

So, while we should read this story from a perspective of God's sustaining grace as a result of their faithfulness, I would propose to you, at least one of the reasons that God chose to intervene so powerfully in the way He did this situation. This is because he knew that it would bring Nebuchadnezzar to faith in Him.

Why is this important....the power that this King wielded among the people of the earth could be turned into a great evangelistic influence on behalf of the Kingdom of God.

Our trials our not only a personal testimony useful to lift us up in times of doubt and trouble, but also a beacon of the truth of who God is and His work in and through His people!

Remember that Nebuchadnezzar was the one who looked into the furnace and was so impressed by what he saw there that he ordered the Hebrew children out of the furnace and then commanded that everyone in the kingdom should worship the one true God of the Israelites.

This is the command from the same man who moments earlier had thrown these Hebrews into the furnace for not worshiping him.

Amazing, isn't it, how God can bring transformation into the lives of those who are confronted with his power. From a self serving, hate filled, man of corruption one moment to a Man who is willing to fully submit his own life and his entire fortune and reign over to the God who walks through fire to save his children.

This is a pretty amazing proposition.

Our text is preceded by several examples of Daniel and his three friends having tried to bear witness to God and being repeatedly rejected for their witness.

Now just a few verses later we read how their witness was made even more powerful as they submitted themselves to God in prayer and relinquished control of their destinies to God's hands.

Now, you and I may feel that we have done everything in our power to win others to Christ and we may have, but that is exactly the point.

We have tried to do everything in OUR power!

We have not fully handed over our outreach efforts to God.

It was not really the fact that the Hebrew children were not destroyed by the fire that puzzled Nebuchadnezzar. Rather, it was the presence of the fourth man in the fire.

It was the fact that someone larger than himself was in control of the situation that he had so carefully orchestrated. This is bound to have an impact.

Think about times when you have made careful plans...

and then those plans are interrupted by situations that are totally out of your own scope of control.

This may make us angry, especially at first... but, we almost always seek to understand the cause behind the failure of our plan.

If we, like Nebuchadnezzar, had devised a plan that was as murderous and contrary to the will of God and then, that plan was interrupted and overpowered by God we would be just as fearful as Nebuchadnezzar was and would be just as willing to admit that God was in fact great enough for us to acknowledge as the one who is truly in control.

Nebuchadnezzar was truly a powerful man and as such was more feared than any other man in his time.

He, then, admits that he is nothing before God and it is out of obedience to this man that other people begin to worship God.

God has a tendency to use this type of person. There are several times in scripture when God had chosen to use people who were of influence to bring others to faith.

This, however, was never accomplished without that person being stripped of their own power and brought to a point of reliance upon God.

Out of an event which was clearly an embarrassing one for Nebuchadnezzar, he was brought to faith and became an "evangelist" of sorts within a few mere moments.

This is an amazing testimony to the power of God to transform lives in any way that he sees fit.

But there are other players in this divine drama that deserve our consideration.

The Hebrew Children, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were thrown into the furnace are certainly near the center of this story. Think about their situation as people who had violated the commands of the king and were then sentenced to death.

They did not fight or rebel but spent what they believed would be their last few moments on earth in worship and dedication to the God who they believed would deliver them from this present threat.

How many of us would maintain this attitude if faced with a similar threat? I doubt if many would.

And yet the story goes on to tell how Nebuchadnezzar saw not three but four men walking unharmed and unbound in the midst of the flames. "and the fourth has the appearance of a god..." said Nebuchadnezzar...

I don't think that the writer of Daniel had any intention to suggest that it was God himself or as other profess...Jesus, that was walking through the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, rather, the Hebrew terminology (elhanin) in Aramaic means "Son of the gods". "Nebuchadnezzar was polytheistic and had no conception of the Christian Trinity. Thus the pagan king only meant that the fourth figure in the fire was divine."

In fact, Nebuchadnezzar calls him an "angel" in 3:28. So when we look at this it becomes rather clear that the writer is referring here to an angel who was sent by God to protect these obedient servants.

In any case, another safe way of stating what it was that protected them would be to say that whether it was an angel, or God himself with them that day, it was clearly the unswerving love and presence of God that maintained these men's faith and kept them safe from harm.

This is the same thing that we discover throughout scripture, but particularly when we read the Old Testament stories of servants of God who overcame threats and obstacles such as these men did.

It was the presence of God who led Moses and the Children of Israel through forty years of wilderness wanderings...

And It was the presence of God who led Joshua to be victorious as he led the Children of Israel to become a nation within the promised land.

The stories of God's presence are too numerous to mention in a short period of time, but always, without exception, God's presence brought victory to those who were faithful.

This is all well and good when we read the stories of God's watchful care over his children in the Bible stories of our childhood...but we must make a connection to today if these stories are to be of any use to us whatsoever.

This is where our faith comes into play.

For centuries after the establishment of Israel as a nation, people had seemed to drift hopelessly from the plan of God.

It became clear to God that there could never be a right relationship in place until people realized once and for all that God would indeed walk with them if they would but yield themselves to his guiding presence.

Jesus Christ came so that those who would profess faith in him could experience firsthand the grace of God in their lives throughout the firestorms that life was sure to deliver.

In the gospels we begin to see this story unfolding, but it is deeply rooted in the history of these Old Testament bible stories.

In the same way that God's presence was the sustaining element for the faithful ones in our story, God's presence can sustain you and me through the fiery furnaces of life because Jesus Christ has drawn near to us.

When Jesus Christ comes into our lives and we acknowledge his presence and power to forgive sins...then we are looked at differently in the eyes of the world.

Just as Nebuchadnezzar saw someone else walking through the fires and it brought him to faith, So too, when others look into the furnace of the trials of our lives they ought to be able to witness the one who walks with us.

When Jesus Christ came into this world he made God personal and accessible to all who would believe and other people are then able to see Christ in action by looking at the lives of those who serve him.

I guess the point is that we should accept Christ as Lord and Savior so that we can be sustained through the fires of life, but then celebrate and acknowledge that God will be glorified in the eyes of the world as well if we remain true to him.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not the only ones saved that day... Nebuchadnezzar was saved from himself and an entire nation was saved from destructive behavior.

In the same way, when we are faithful, of course we are saved, but so too are others brought to salvation by witnessing in the lives of Christians the power of the God who is willing to come to us personally and walk beside us through the fire.

Life may indeed be a “furnace” from time to time.

But, God can and will be glorified even in the hottest of times. Of this we can be assured!