

9/1/24 Christ Fellowship

## Jesus in the Fire – Daniel 3

You've probably heard of the phrase "we'll cook his goose" or "his goose is cooked" or something like that. It means something bad is about to happen. But you might find it interesting where that phrase came from. In 1401, John Hus was ordained into the priesthood and taught and preached to thousands at a Christian university in what is now the Czech Republic. He was a vocal proponent of every person being able to read the Bible in his own language. Back in the day, that was enough to stir up a lot of the church leadership. But he also took a vocal stand against immorality and extravagance in the lives of clergy. Well, now he's really stepping on some toes. So, the powers that be threw him into prison until he would recant. But his only response was, *"I would not, for a chapel full of gold, recede from the truth."*

Well, now the church council was furious and had him formally condemned to die by being burned at the stake. So, they tied his hands behind his back and wrapped a chain around his neck and around a stake in the ground and piled up wood and straw up to his neck. Then they asked him one more time to recant what he had said but he refused. He said, *"In the truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught and preached I will die today with gladness!"* And as the flames built up, his last words were, *"Christ, the Son of the Living God, have mercy on me!"* And since his last name, Hus, meant "goose" in Czechoslovakian, that's where we get the phrase, "cooked his goose." It kind of changes my desire to ever use that phrase again.

But my question for you today is, where was God? This was an honorable, God-fearing, Bible-loving, Jesus-worshiping faithful preacher of the Gospel and because some people got their feelings hurt when he spoke the truth, he was horribly murdered. So, where was God in all this? Was He unaware? Was He unable to help? Did He not care? And don't tell me you've never had the same questions in your own life.

Maybe you went through a bad divorce (are there any good ones?) or maybe the doctor gave you horrible news or even worse, he gave your loved one horrible news. Maybe you have had a financial crisis or crippling depression. There has probably been a time in your life when you have cried out, ***"God, where are you and why don't you help?"***

We can get at least some partial answers to that deep question by turning to the wonderful little Old Testament book of Daniel. Daniel is in between **Ezekiel** and **Hosea** well to the east of Psalms. We are going there to start off a new sermon series on finding Jesus in the

Old Testament. Now, some of you might think that Jesus is only found in the New Testament. And, by name, you would be right. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the name Jesus found. But have you ever been watching a movie and some famous movie star just kind of slips in and then slips out of the movie? They make a cameo. Well, that's sort of like what Jesus does in the Old Testament. He's not named. Usually He will be described as "an angel of the Lord" or something similar and sometimes it could possibly be just an "ordinary" angel but usually those are just messengers and most of the time they are named. But the preincarnate Jesus definitely shows up in some places in the Old Testament because the theme of the whole Bible is about Jesus.

Jesus Himself confirmed the fact that He is in the Old Testament. In **John 5:46** He explained to some religious leaders who had challenged Him that the Old Testament was talking about Him: *"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."* Another time when Jesus showed that He is in the Old Testament was on the day of His resurrection. Jesus was walking with two of His disciples, and *"beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself"* (Luke 24:27). Earlier, before His crucifixion, Jesus had pointed to **Isaiah 53:12** and said, *"It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors' and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment"* (Luke 22:37). (Is Jesus in the Old Testament? GotQuestions.org)

So, this morning we are going to look at a time when Jesus showed up in an amazing way to save and just be with some believers in the book of Daniel, third chapter. You have probably been reading this story since you were a little kid. I love this story. This and "Daniel in the lions' den" are classics of not just the Bible but all of literature.

As you know, Daniel and his three Hebrew friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were taken prisoner when Israel was conquered and taken to Babylon where they were found to be very intelligent and helpful to the king so they were given nice jobs in the government of Babylon. They didn't want to be there, of course, but since they were there, they made the best of it and honored God and the king when they could. But when the king made them choose between honoring him and honoring God, it was an easy choice for these young men. Let's look at it in **Daniel 3**.

To save time on a familiar passage, I'll set it up this way. King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue 90 feet high and made a law that when the music sounded, everybody had to bow down and worship this golden idol. Well, the three Hebrew boys were absolutely not

ever going to do that and some people told the king about it. So, let's pick it up there in **verse 13** through the end of the chapter.

*Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." <sup>19</sup> 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 <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

*<sup>24</sup> 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, Your Majesty." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

Oh, I love that story! It makes me smile. But I can’t get one question out of my head. That is, what did this furnace look like? Am I the only one curious about it? I even Googled it and just didn’t find much. Evidently it was like a giant chiminea. You know those clay pot things that people have in their yard and they put a little fire in there and smoke comes out of the top. And you can see the flames in the side. Or maybe it was just a big pit with some stairs built in or something. I don’t know.

But I have four other real questions I want to work through this morning. Hopefully these questions will be helpful to you when you are in your fiery furnace whatever it looks like. I want to know why Jesus showed up then. Why doesn’t He show up for us now? What has He promised us? And what has He not promised us?

Let’s look back at the text. Look at **verses 23-25**. *...and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.* <sup>24</sup> *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, Your Majesty.”* <sup>25</sup> *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.”*

So, evidently they were able to throw the Hebrew boys in at the top and the king was able to see them land by looking through the opening in the side. But as soon as they landed, there were now four men in the fire. And the king’s response seems kind of silly at first but don’t make fun of him until you have seen a giant miracle first-hand.

When he said, *“Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”* it wasn’t because he couldn’t remember. He was just rightfully amazed. I’m reminded of Peter at the transfiguration of Jesus. In **Matthew 17** Peter looks up and there stands Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus and Peter says, *“Hey this is great! Want me to build y’all some shelters?”* I have an idea Jesus looked at him and just shook his head like, *“No, Pete, just sit there quietly if possible.”*

But King Nebuchadnezzar sees four men and is, of course, astounded. And he says the fourth one looks like the son of the gods. The actual closest interpretation is more like “like to a son of God.” Now this is coming from a pagan king who did not know the One, True God nor did he have any inkling that the actual Son of God would one day come to earth to

save our souls. His response is more along the lines of, *“Hey that 4<sup>th</sup> guy is god-like.”* The fourth man had a bearing and mannerisms and a visage of being more than just a man.

Some scholars that are way smarter than I am argue that this is just an angel but I believe it really was Jesus because of the king’s description. In other places when an angel shows up, he’s ten feet tall, armed to the teeth and a scary looking warrior. Nebuchadnezzar describes Him as a man with a bearing like some kind of god. I’m sure the king believed in hundreds of little-g gods and didn’t recognize Jesus as the One True God but as just one of many gods.

But the question remains, why did Jesus show up here for these three young men in the fire? And the even better question is, why doesn’t He show up when we are going through the fire? Well, let’s think about the miracles we see in scripture. You know, we have a tendency to read the Bible as if miracles were occurring behind every bush and every other day by everybody in history. But actually, if you look at the appearance of miracles in the Bible, they were quite rare. There might be hundreds or even thousands of years between any kind of real miracle.

You know, miracles in the Bible are not given to persuade people of the existence of God. The existence of God is already established long before there’s any kind of real miracles. The purpose of the miracle in the Bible is not to prove the existence of God, but it is to prove the legitimacy and the validity of representatives of God and what they said and what they believed. It was true in the Old Testament and it was true in the New Testament.

When Jesus showed up in that fiery furnace, that was a great and comforting, amazing thing for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego but He didn’t do it just for them. He did it for the king. He did it for every Jew in captivity in Babylon and for every Jew in later years who would read this and know that there is a God in Heaven who cares for them as they went through the Holocaust or any other atrocity. He also did it for us so that we would know it as well.

So, why doesn’t Jesus show up bodily in our fiery trials? Or at least show up spiritually and take us out of some of the worst of our physical problems? The Bible records several stories of those who called out to God in a time of need and, at least for a while, were met with silence. Job is the most obvious example, as in his distress he felt as if God were nowhere to be found: *“If I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him”* (Job 23:8–9). The psalmists also struggled with the feeling that God was not responding to their cries: *“Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself*

*in times of trouble?”* (Psalm 10:1); *“How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”* (Psalm 13:1); *“Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?”* (Psalm 44:24).

But I hear ya. Knowing that God has a history of not answering prayers like people want Him to is not helping you in your fiery trial, is it? Well, let’s see what God promises us and what He doesn’t. First, God never promises an easy life. It says in **Job 5** that man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward. (5:7) It says there again in **chapter 14** that man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. How about that? Does that help you? No? Me either.

I know. I know. What if we are really good and faithful Christians? Maybe God will cut us some slack then, right? You know, like Paul who said in **2 Corinthians 12**, *“There was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me and God said, Oh sure Paul! Let me help you out. And then I never had another problem.”* Your version may read a little different than that.

In fact, the truth is that God told Paul that He wouldn’t remove the thorn. But He made Paul a promise and here is where we get to the good stuff. This is where we see the promises that God has made to us. He told Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* God promises His grace. What is grace? Grace is not getting what you deserve. And what do we deserve? Well, to be blunt, we deserve to go to Hell. We don’t deserve God’s presence or His forgiveness or His mercy or His wisdom. But as believers we don’t get what we deserve. That’s God’s grace.

Since God is omniscient, He knows everything and is privy to details we cannot begin to understand. **Psalm 147:5** says, *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”* When we cry out to God, *“Please help me,”* He sees your heart and understands (Hebrews 4:15), and His response will always be out of love (Romans 5:8; Psalm 139:13–16). And so we can submit to His authority because He is trustworthy.

Jesus assures us that God will only give us what is good and right in **Luke 11:11–13**, *“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* The God who keeps track of every sparrow cares about the details of our lives, too (Luke 12:5–6).

Where's LilBit? (My dog) Come here, LilBit. I want you to see this little girl right here. Every morning she wakes up and she is so excited. As soon as my feet hit the floor, she starts jumping up. She is so excited to start the day because she knows she is going to get everything she needs and more. She doesn't know where the dog food comes from. She doesn't know how the water in her bowl gets there. She doesn't understand how my truck works or how we get in and it takes us somewhere. She doesn't know much of anything that humans would call smart. But she trusts me. And so, when I say, "*Come on LilBit, let's go*" she's headed out and jumping up, excited. It may be to the vet or it may be to go f-i-s-h-i-n-g but she trusts me so she's (usually) obedient.

That's all God asks of you. This life is short. Scripture says it's like a wisp of smoke. And it's a test. This life is a temporary test for eternal blessings. In the midst of his fiery trial, Job said, "*But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10). And we will definitely have problems, some of us more than others but God promises to never leave us or forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) He tells us in **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.*" It may feel like it sometimes. It will be hard. But we just have to trust Him because we know He made us, He redeemed us, He delivered us and He loves us.

That's where the promises of peace and joy come in for those of us that are truly believers in and followers of Jesus. Is that you? Do you have peace and joy in the trials? Are you able to confidently say with those three boys, "***I know He can and I know He will but even if He doesn't, still I will worship Him!***"? If you need to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, do that today. Not only are we not guaranteed another breath but without Him you are missing out on peace and joy and all the other promises in this life but you are especially missing out on the promise of eternity with Him in Heaven.

Ask Him to forgive you of all your sins and then repent or turn away from that lifestyle. Believe in Him to provide you with everything you need in this life and more and in the next life too. That will change the way you live and the way you die. Do it right now as the music plays.