

The Delivery

April 18, 2021

Daniel 3:19-30

We left off our study of the book of Daniel in chapter 3, story of the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been seen not bowing down to the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. The king was very angry when he heard that. He brought the three men before him and asked if it was true. Then he announced that he would be nice and give them one more opportunity to show their allegiance to him and his god, again threatening them with instant death in the super-heated furnace if they failed to comply. But then, as we noted last week, he made the fateful mistake of categorizing this as a battle of the gods, “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” As students of Scripture, we already know how this is going to turn out! Without even reading the rest of the story, I already know that there IS a God who can deliver them out of his hand. He is the God of heaven, the God of the Hebrew people, Yahweh, our God. He is fully capable to do such a thing.

So the three men respond to the king by declaring that their God IS able to deliver them from his hand. He is their king, not their God. And they finish their interaction with this incredible statement of faith, that EVEN IF THEIR GOD DOES NOT deliver them, still they will not serve or bow down to his god. Their loyalty to their God was total, much more than their loyalty to their king. They were willing to die rather than cross that line and bow before another god.

There, that brings us up to speed in the story. Today we take on the conclusion of the story. And as you can see from the title, “The Delivery” we know how this turns out. God does indeed deliver the three men from the fiery furnace and the hand of the king. He does so in miraculous fashion. What makes this story unique is not that Yahweh delivers His servants, but how He delivers them. In other words, there might have been 1,000 ways in which God could have delivered them: send rain, send an army, give the men an ancient fire

extinguisher, cause an earthquake, and so on. But the way He chose to do so gives truth that goes WAY beyond the situation at hand. Indeed, the way in which Yahweh delivered the three men is not explained in the text. It is left for us to make sense of. Let's read what happened when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the blazing hot fiery furnace. READ Daniel 3:19-30.

Main point: Yahweh proves who is the real God by sending His Son to walk with us through the worst of this life and deliver us in the process.

He is not just an all-powerful God who is able to deliver. He is the covenant making God who walks through the worst things in life WITH us. He lives among us. He is not just powerful over us, over all. He cares about us so much that He walks with us through it.

Can you already see where this is headed? Of course, it leads us directly to Jesus. The Scriptures say He dwelt among us. He endured everything that we are called to endure. He understands our pain, hardship, the things which happen to us because of standing firmly for Him. And He not only gets it, He not only promises to remember it, He walks with us through it. He stands beside us in the fire, He holds us when we weep, He picks us up when we fall. Jesus goes through this life with us. Indeed, that is a primary reason why He came when and how He did. He came to fulfill the OT promise that God would dwell among His people, wherever they are, no matter how yucky is their situation. He is our constant companion. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. He promises that He will be with us even to the end of the age. That's our Jesus. He gives us a glimpse of that here in Daniel 3, some 600 years before Jesus was born.

I trust you are getting the picture. This fourth person in the fire is not just some messenger from God, some heavenly rope expert who can untie knots. No, He is the Son of God who still stands with His people in their darkest moments. That's just who He is. (3 parts)

I. The enemies of God will go to great lengths to bind and destroy God's people. vv.19-23

This is what they do. This is what they always do. The Scriptures tell us this is the goal of satan. He is like a prowling lion waiting for whom he can destroy. In other words, this should not surprise us or cause us to despair when it happens. In fact, Jesus warned His disciples that when they did such things to them, they ought to remember that they did it to Him first and they were really just trying to destroy Jesus. But since they cannot do that, they go after the people of God. This passage is just a picture of this whole concept.

v.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.

He thought so highly of himself and was so sure of the rightness of his command that anyone who dared disobey him deserved the worst of the worst. In this case, they deserved to be burned alive in a furnace heated up 7 times hotter than normal. Now, given the type of furnace this was, it probably means adding extra fuel and using billows type devices to force more air through the fire, causing it to burn hotter. Think of it as adding a super charger to their furnace. From the description here, this is quite a large furnace. When they are unbound, they will be able to walk around. That's a large furnace. To get that furnace 7 times hotter would be no small feat, especially if this furnace was designed to melt metal, iron, bronze, copper. 7 times the heat to melt such metals would be a hot furnace! Clearly the action here was designed to be overkill. In other words, being thrown into such a furnace at normal operating temperature would bring instant death. So, to heat it up 7 times hotter was designed to show outrage, create a spectacle, cause all who saw it to vow never to do such a thing. This is what happens to you when you cross the all powerful king!

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, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.

Not only did the king order them thrown into the fire, he also had them bound. They would be tied up, unable to resist or shield themselves from the intense heat. Again, the purpose is to demonstrate how helpless they were to resist the authority of the king. And not only did he have them bound, he had them bound fully clothed. He wanted them to burn like torches, with their layers of clothing (including their hats) acting as fuel touching their bodies. They were going to suffer while they were dying, with nothing they could do to stop it. This is what happens when you cross the king!

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.

Normally, the heat from the fire would go away from the opening, up the chimney. But because of the effort to make the fire hotter by forcing air into the fire, those who had the job of throwing the men into the fire themselves were killed by the heat and flames. These men obeyed and still were killed. This is what happens when you anger the king! Or is it, this is what happens when you anger the King of kings!!!

Allow me to pause for a moment. I know I'm painting a pretty bleak picture of the life to which God calls His people to live. And I know that some of you, perhaps many of you have never experienced such angry wrath from authorities over you. But the Scriptures are clear that we ought to expect to be treated this way, especially as the day of Jesus' return draws near. So, I would rather prepare you for the worst, even if you are never asked to endure such suffering. The truth is that God tells us to expect it. He tells us this so that we will not lose heart should such things come our way. He doesn't promise us good all the time. He promises us hardship and suffering if we stand for Him as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

II. God personally frees us and delivers us from His enemies. vv.24-25

Once more, the beauty of this story is not the fact that God delivers. That alone is great and inspiring. But even much more so is it great and inspiring and

instructive HOW God does it here. As we see with King Nebuchadnezzar, so we too ought to be shocked when we ponder the image of the 4th person in the fire.

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.”

Since we have a mention of a door in v.26, I assume here the door to the furnace was open. So, the king came close enough to see inside and probably get the satisfaction that his orders had been carried out and the rebels were dead. And yet, when he looked inside, he saw something wrong. He asks his VERY helpful counselors (you know, the ones who hated Daniel and his friends!) how many people they threw into the furnace. Three, right? That’s correct. Simple math.

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.”

If we threw in three, why are there four now, with all of them not bound but walking around in the fire? They are not dead, they are not even hurt. And the fourth one looks very different from the rest. He looks like “a son of the gods.” There you have it. This is the heart of the story. And yet, this is all we know about the 4th figure. When the three men come out of the fire, there is no mention of the 4th figure. He seemingly disappears. So, all we have is that he doesn’t look like the rest, and that the king described him as “a son of the gods.” There’s a pretty good chance that he is the one who untied the three men. Now, I have some pretty strong convictions on the identity of this 4th figure in the fire. I believe it is the pre-incarnate Son of God. I don’t think it is coincidence that the king used the description that he did. I think “a son of the gods” is meant to lead us to the conclusion that the king said more than he knew. He saw him as not like the others, but he didn’t use the word “angel.” He does later in his blessing of v.28, but not here. I also don’t think it is coincidence that we have here the title “son of the god(s)” and in chapter 7, we will have “Son of Man”, both titles used by Jesus in the gospels. Yes, I’m pretty

confident that this was no angel but was the pre-incarnate Son of God, Jesus the Christ. This text is designed to point us to Jesus. Can I prove it? No. Is there a better explanation? No. Does this fit a pattern with other texts? Yes, several, starting with Genesis 3.

So, what do we do with this 4th character? Why did God choose to deliver the three men as He did? It seems pretty clear to me that God is making a point. These men were not abandoned, alone, trapped and bound by an authority stronger than them and their God. No, He was walking through this ordeal with them, enduring everything they were enduring, caring for their needs, protecting them from harm. He is dwelling in the midst of His people.

You must see this as a big picture text. Yes, it is a bit cryptic. Yes, there are details left unexplained. But clearly God wants us to know that He is with us personally when we are suffering, particularly when we are suffering for His name's sake. This is a theme throughout Scripture and clear right now. God does not abandon His own, even when they are exiles in Babylon. And the intriguing part is that God arranged it so King Nebuchadnezzar has a part in it. He was a witness. He issues the report. He describes what he saw. This is not Daniel, or another believer who sees it all, this is the pagan king who sees it. And I suspect it plays a part in his reaction in the next section.

III. A clear understanding of God's activities will result in His praise and worship. vv. 26-30

Once more, Nebuchadnezzar's response is the right response, the hoped for response. But as we will see in the next chapter, it too will be short-lived. He just doesn't get it, even if he does the right thing temporarily.

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.

Just as we saw last week, there is a repetition featured in this story, here the names of the three Hebrew men, called by their Babylonian names. The

story just keeps repeating them. But here we see that the king calls the men out of the furnace. Now, that in itself is pretty amazing given the circumstances. These men should all be dead like the ones who threw them into the fire. And yet, here is the king calling them by name OUT of the fire. And they came. They obeyed the king. Imagine that scene as the three men emerge from the blazing hot fire with flames and heat so intense that you can't get close and perhaps having to step over the dead bodies of the ones who threw them in. They were thrown into the fire bound, and they walked out, walked right out of that grave! Oops, sorry!

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.

This is the amazing result. Not only did they survive the furnace, but there was no trace or hint or evidence that they were ever in there. They were miraculously protected from the flames, the heat. It mattered not that the furnace was 7 times hotter. God was protecting them and His protection was complete!

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 the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

Wow, this sounds incredible! This reads really, really well. Bless this God who personally protected and saved His servants. They are to be commended for their faith and making a stand to resist the king's command. They showed they were willing to die rather than worship another god. They are to be role models for all! Does this sound like the king, or the words of a psalmist reflecting on the scene? And that is the point. This is presented as the correct response from someone on the scene...even if he was the one who gave the order that was disobeyed. He was no longer angry, he was in awe. He was in the presence of a God whose power greatly exceeded his own. He is acknowledging

that there was a God who could deliver the men from his hand. And now, he was bowing before that 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.

Once more, there is a decree of the king. No one can speak against this God. This doesn't mean everyone has to worship Him, but it does mean that you must not speak ill of Him, or put Him down. Why? Because this God is able to rescue in a miraculous way. He is powerful. He is personal. He protects His own. Don't mess with Him!

And then he gave the three men a promotion. Once more, I imagine the anger of the other counselors. Not only had their plot failed, but the end result is that the Hebrew men had even more power and authority. They were not killed, they were promoted! Thank you, God.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will expect persecution.
- 2) We will engrain in our minds that when suffering such hardship, our God is with us, next to us, enduring what we are enduring.
- 3) We will resist the urge to claim that God has abandoned us, clinging to His promises to stay with us through it all.
- 4) We will praise Him when He delivers us.