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Sermon Notes

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A Fiery Trial, A Vindicated Faith

Daniel 3

I. The History of Persecution: Government Gone Berserk

- A. Government: Established by God, Perverted by Satan
 - 1. Established by God: Romans 13
 - 2. Perverted by Satan: Revelation 13
 - 3. State Religion: An Unholy Marriage
- B. “Why do you persecute me?”: Christ on Trial Again and Again
 - 1. Christ’s experiences
 - 2. Christ’s warnings
- C. Prophecy Fulfilled: The Church on Trial
 - 1. The Apostles
 - 2. Christ vs. Caesar: Rome Attacks, Christ Conquers
 - a. Polycarp
 - b. “Just burn a pinch”
 - c. Tertullian
 - d. Origen
 - e. serial victories
 - f. the unholy marriage: a defeat
 - 3. The Reformation
 - a. Luther’s trial

- b. Cranmer's execution
- c. Hubmaier's book

No separation of church and state

- 4. Modern Martyrs
 - a. the bloody 20th century
 - b. "The Church is Bigger Than You Think"

D. Ancient Roots: Daniel's Era

II. Nebuchadnezzar's Defiant Statue (3:1-7)

A. Context: (Daniel 2, 3:1-3)

- 1. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Rejected?
 - a. the future of Babylon
 - b. the head of gold becomes the whole statue
 - c. Nebuchadnezzar's war with God
 - d. God's warning to Nebuchadnezzar: Psalm 2
- 2. The Statue Described
 - a. immense size
 - b. dazzling appearance
 - c. odd shape
- 3. The People Summoned
 - a. a tyrant's lust: total power
 - b. all the people must submit
 - c. statue merely a symbol
 - d. state religion a tool: religion the opiate of the masses AND the tyrants

B. Command (3:4-5)

1. The Herald
2. The Music
3. The Worship

C. Consequences (3:6)

1. Death by burning
2. A tyrant's greatest weapon: intimidation
3. Fear the opiate of the masses

Illus. Hitler's political "campaigns": 98% victories!!

D. Compliance (3:7)

1. Fear does its work
2. What was being worshipped: earthly comfort!
3. Context for courage: universal compliance

III. The Chaldeans' Jealous Accusation (3:8-12)

A. The Chaldeans' Motives

1. Chaldeans: highest level of court official; skilled in astrology
2. Jealousy over Jews promotion

Illus. Office politics; slander enemy to gain advantage and promotion

vs. 12 *"But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—who pay no attention to you...*

- They sought to make trouble for the Jews and get rid of them for good!
- Slight hint of questioning of King's decision
- Also some hint of racism... these are outsiders, O King, and you promoted them over us
- Ironic... their action would lead to even greater promotions for these Jews!!

3. Conviction over personal sins

Exodus 2:13-14 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?"

The Jewish men's convictions made their lives seem sinful by contrast... in their hearts, they must have known of God's decree against them:

Romans 1:32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1 John 3:12-13 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

B. Flatter the King, Denounce God's People (3:8-9)

1. Flattery first:

vs. 9 "O King, live forever."

We already covered that... the king would not be king forever... He would live forever only by faith in the eternal God!!

These Chaldeans were playing the court game... flatter the leader to get what you want

Also: idea is that they were loyal to the King and concerned about King's authority

2. Slander second

vs. 8 "At this time some Chaldeans denounced the Jews..."

- a. expression lit. "ate the pieces of"
- b. implies sitting at the king's table instead of these and eating to choice delicacies which had been meant for them
- c. simple meaning: to accuse formally, as in a court of law

C. Making the Accusation (3:10-12)

1. Recount the decree & its penalty

2. Make the accusation: some Jews refuse
3. Three-fold accusation
 - a. “they pay no attention to you, O King...”
 - b. “they do not serve your gods...”
 - c. “they do not worship the image of gold you set up...”

King Nebuchadnezzar ignored the first, and focused on the other two

IV. The Jews’ Trial by Fire (3:13-23)

A. Faith Must Be Tested in the Furnace

1. Faith is hidden... the fruit of faith is open for all to see
2. God tests our faith by putting us in trying circumstances
3. Trials prove the genuineness of faith and purify it from false elements

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

4. God’s own name is at stake

Isaiah 48:9-11 For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. ¹⁰ See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

God tests our faith for His own glory, to put His power on display... this chapter is a perfect example!!

B. Nebuchadnezzar Provides the Furnace

1. The tyrant's rage

Illus. Hitler dominated people with his temper... his rage was terrifying to everyone; Herman Goering, head of German airforce, the Luftwaffe, was a highly decorated WWI ace... but he quivered with fear when bringing Hitler bad news; high ranking German officials secretly called Hitler "carpet-chewer" because he sometimes threw himself in a rage down on the carpeted floor and rolled around like a raving lunatic foaming at the mouth and chewing the carpet if he was angered

- a. like most tyrant's, rage connected with pride
- b. human anger is "moral filth"
- c. anger of kings more filthy, because power of life & death rest with him

Proverbs 20:2 A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life.

2. The summons

- a. one ca only imagine what was going through Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's mind as they walked into the King's throne room
- b. the look of hatred on everyone's face... the shame of reproach, the heat of the furnace
- c. tempted to cave in... time to think about it

3. The inquisition

"Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?"

- a. emphasis on intimidation
- b. counselors snickering... their plot is working perfectly

4. The "second chance"

- a. sometimes the more difficult trial... if we must for a long time resist
- b. freedom awaits anytime you bow the knee to the god of this world

5. The threat

- a. Nebuchadnezzar's over is raging hot... perhaps they could feel the heat!

- b. immediate punishment awaits... no idle threat either!
- c. lesson of faith: a far more dangerous trial awaited... JUDGMENT DAY

“Is it true, O Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah that you feared man more than me, that you turned your back on my commandment and worshipped an idol?”

A far more dangerous punishment awaits the unbelievers: eternal fire

Polycarp: But he again said to him, ‘If you despise the wild beasts, I will cause you to be consumed by fire, unless you repent.’ But Polycarp said, ‘You threaten a fire which burns for an hour, and after a little while is quenched; for you know not the fire of the future judgment and of the eternal punishment which is reserved for the unbelievers. But why do you delay? Do what you will.’

6. The arrogant boast

vs. 15 “Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?!!”

- a. this line may well have saved their lives
- b. Nebuchadnezzar was in open defiance of the God of Israel
- c. this became a contest between the King of Heaven and the supposed King of earth
- d. God’s reputation is at stake... He NEVER LOSES these battles

C. The Jews Provide the Faith (vs. 16-18)

1. Majestic answer!! One of the greatest statements of courage in all the Bible
2. Only one answered, but all agreed... it’s as though they all said it!!
3. No need to answer the King: God’s law the more important
4. God IS ABLE to deliver us from the fire

Faith comes from hearing the Word... God’s promise through Isaiah may well have been their source of courage and faith... if you lack faith, feed on the word

Isaiah 43:2-3 When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...

5. YET God is free... He is under no obligation to save us; yet we will still obey Him

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him

These three men knew God owed them nothing for their obedience; this is the highest form of faith: GOD IS ABLE TO SAVE US, BUT EVEN IF HE DOESN'T WE WILL NOT DISOBEY HIM!!

Illus. Once Genghis Khan was seeking to conquer a walled city; he summoned the king of the city under a flag of truce to discuss the situation; the king came and stood before the great Khan; he steadfastly refused to surrender his city; Genghis Khan called three of his best soldiers forward and gave orders to kill themselves; the soldiers promptly obeyed without hesitation... Khan looked at the horrified king and said, "Every man in my army would die for me if I should give the command. How can you resist us?" The king promptly surrendered his city.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were willing to die rather than disobey God!

D. Nebuchadnezzar's Enraged Sentence

1. Merely angry before... now almost berserk with rage
2. His "face changed"... perhaps grotesque facial contortions
3. Orders fire stoked seven times hotter
 - Insanity of anger... a hot fire kills instantly; slow fire the more torturous way to die
4. Best soldiers in his army enlisted to throw them in... they died instantly
5. The clothes mentioned: completely flammable!!
6. Also "tied up": firmly bound, unable to resist, completely in the hands of God

V. God's Vindication by Faith (3:16-18, 24-30)

A. God's Reputation At Stake

1. Nebuchadnezzar had defeated the God of Israel on the battlefield
2. God had been unable to protect these Jews from becoming captives
3. No god had been able to save his people from the Babylonian army
4. Nebuchadnezzar openly boasting over God

vs. 15 "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?!!"

Nothing in all the universe motivates God so much as a concern for His own glory; it motivates Him far more than desire to protect Israel

Isaiah 48:10-11 See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.

B. Faith Vindicates God

1. Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego's loyalty to God vindicated God
2. Our faith displays God's glory
3. It says "I'd rather have God's pleasure than life itself"
4. Their faith became the platform for God to do a great miracle and deliver them

C. God's Vindicates the Faith-filled

1. Not only did the Jews vindicate God, God vindicated the Jews
2. He supernaturally protected these three from the fire & heat
3. HOW?? I have no idea... heat is transmitted by air molecules to us; the air becomes excited & molecules rush around faster and faster... God put a protective barrier around them and their clothes so they would not be burned
4. ROPES fell off... free to walk around during fiery trial!!

Great freedom & joy during fiery trial: it becomes a pleasure and a great honor to represent God this way!

1 Peter 4:12-14 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹

D. "A Son of the Gods"

1. Two great principle revealed in these verses
 - a. fellowship with God for the sufferer
 - b. revelation of the glory of God for the outsiders
2. Sweet fellowship with God
 - a. perhaps He was the actual preincarnate Christ Himself

- b. walking together with God:

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.

- 3. Display of God's glory

- a. what made the fourth figure in the fire appear like a son of the gods?
- b. could it be that he was shining even more brightly than the fire??

E. "Come out of the fire!!"

- 1. Humorous command:

vs. 26 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,

- a. no, king... you come in here and get us!
- b. but that would have been rebellious... they were in submission to the king when his commands didn't contradict God's

- 2. Total amazement at the miracle:

vs. 27 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.

F. Nebuchadnezzar's Rewards: (For what they're worth)

- 1. Nebuchadnezzar's rewards:

- a. for God, a second poem of praise
perhaps even more heartfelt than the first

vs. 28 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.

- b. also, a decree to speak no insults to this God!!

vs. 29 *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."*

2. God answered His question:

vs. 15 *"Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?!!"*

Just as earlier He had answered Pharaoh's similarly insolent question:

Exodus 5:2 *Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go?"*

"Let me introduce myself to you, since you don't seem to know me! I am the God who made heaven, earth, the seas, and everything in them. I hold your very existence in my hand. I can terminate your life and all your power anytime I choose."

3. Nebuchanezzar's rewards: for the Jews... greater promotion and power

VI. Applications

- Is the world a friend to faith?
- Is your faith genuine?
- Is your faith pure?
- Do you love your life too much?

Revelation 12:11 *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

- Will you speak for God?
- Will God save you from the final fire?

Nebuchadnezzar's final statement:

No other God can save this way!!

Do you know this God, and the salvation He will bring from a far more dangerous fire??