

Who Is Able To Rescue?

Scripture Text: Daniel 3:19-30

Introduction

What will you do when you face a real threat to your faith? Do you believe that God will rescue you from whatever trials you face? What if He does not? Will you still trust Him and follow Him faithfully? Such is the situation we find in Daniel chapter three.

Nebuchadnezzar commanded his people to worship a huge, golden statue or they would be executed. When Nebuchadnezzar called his people together to worship his golden statue, the great crowd of people fell down and worshipped the colossal statue, except for three young, Hebrew men. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not about to worship a false god, even if it meant that they would be executed. Some of Nebuchadnezzar's people, the Chaldeans, saw their disobedience and told the king that they did not serve his gods or worship his golden statue. Perhaps they hated the Jewish people. Perhaps they were jealous of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's government positions. Either way, the three Hebrew men faced a real problem. Sometimes, in order to flee from idolatry, we must flee into a burning, fiery furnace. The three young Hebrew men told Nebuchadnezzar that God was able to save them, but even if He did not, they would never bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue.

Nebuchadnezzar's Prideful Challenge

Nebuchadnezzar was not pleased with their disobedience. He questioned them and gave them a second chance to worship his statue. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar question them for disobeying him, he also challenged God. He said the following.

Daniel 3:15 ...if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?

Nebuchadnezzar asked, "Who is the god who can rescue you out of my hands?" He should have known who this "god" was. God had already shown him the future through a dream. Nebuchadnezzar had also acknowledged Daniel's God, but only as one god in a list of other gods to worship. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar thought that he had more power than God had. Perhaps he thought that the God of Daniel was good for revealing dreams and things from the future, but what could He do to such a powerful king? After all, Nebuchadnezzar had all but destroyed the Jewish people and exiled many of them to Babylon. Surely, he thought that he and his gods were more powerful than the God of the Jews. Even such a great god as theirs would not be able to protect His faithful followers from death in a fiery furnace. Seeing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's defiance in the face of certain death, Nebuchadnezzar was furious. Who did these three, young Hebrew men think they were? Look at the following verses.

Daniel 3:19–22 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. 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. 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.

The king's facial expression changed and became flushed with anger. He was so mad that he ordered the furnace to be heated "seven times hotter" than normal. This probably meant "as hot as possible". Daniel also tells us that Nebuchadnezzar ordered some of his strongest men to bind up his three friends. Why the king needed the furnace as hot as possible and some of his strongest men to complete this duty is not clear. As we will see, even the hottest flames and the strongest men have no power over God. All of our pursuits to outwit or overpower God are useless; and yet, do we still try to control God? Do we try to tell God what He can or cannot do? Ironically, Nebuchadnezzar's order resulted in the death of his own soldiers. This shows us at least two things. Sometimes our anger has unintended consequences. When we lash out in anger, people we may not have intended to get hurt, are harmed. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar's fury caused the death of his own soldiers helping him carry out his own orders. Another thing the killing of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers tells us is that the king was unable to protect his own people. As we will see, God is able to protect His servants better than Nebuchadnezzar could protect his own "mighty men".

God Rescues Us With His Presence

Had Nebuchadnezzar won the challenge? Had he defended his honor and punished those disobedient, Hebrew miscreants? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew something that apparently Nebuchadnezzar did not, that God was able to save them, even from a fiery furnace. God could do that, but they also accepted that God was sovereign and could do what He desired to do. There was no guarantee that when Nebuchadnezzar tossed them into the fiery furnace, they would survive. Perhaps, they expected to die, but they would still not bow down to his golden idol that certainly had no power to save them. They trusted the one true God who could save them, and who would do what is best, even if it meant their suffering. God was not only able, but He was also willing, and He showed up in a miraculous way. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 3:24–25 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."* 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."*

Nebuchadnezzar was prepared to see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disintegrate in the flames, but he was not prepared for what he actually saw. He jumped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers if they had really thrown *only* three men into the fire. They assured him that was true; but, Nebuchadnezzar saw Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego unbound, unhurt, free of their ropes, and walking in the midst of the fire. Now, some people can walk on burning coals, but I have not heard of anyone *else* being able to walk around unhurt within a fiery furnace. That would have been incredible by itself, but that was not all that Nebuchadnezzar saw. Not only were the three Hebrew men walking in the furnace alive, they were also not alone. They had stood alone when the others bowed down to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol, but now they were most definitely not alone in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person who appeared to be a divine being, like a "son of the gods". Some believe this fourth person was an angel of God, as Nebuchadnezzar later testified. Others, however, believe this fourth person was a physical appearance of Jesus before His incarnation. Either way, this was a dramatic, physical demonstration of God's presence with His people who were in distress. It was also a fulfillment of God's promise to the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 43:1–2 ¹ *But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."*

The Lord promised to be with His people, especially in the most difficult times of life. This ensures that our trials and difficulties will not utterly overwhelm us. This reminds me of the "Footprints in the Sand" poem. That poem tells a story of man walking along the beach with God while scenes from his life flashed across the sky. At the end of the walk, he looked back and noticed that at times there were only one set of footprints. He also noticed that those were the lowest and saddest times of his life. He thought God had left him during his most troublesome times in his life. But, God lovingly assured him that those moments when there were only one set of footprints in the sand, it was God who was carrying the man through those difficult times. Although God does not guarantee that we will never suffer in life, He promises to always be with us during those times. No matter what your circumstance is, no matter what fiery furnace you face, God has promised to be with you. Therefore, have no fear. You are not alone.

God Rescues Us Completely

Just how much does God rescue us? Is it a little? Is it a lot? Remember, Daniel made a point to tell us in verse twenty-one that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound in their full garments — their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and other apparel — and then they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Their clothing would have rapidly caught fire and engulfed the three men in flames. However, not only were they fine, not even their garments were "touched" by the flames. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 3:26–27 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. 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.

Nebuchadnezzar was truly amazed and even declared Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as servants of the Most High God. Now, we should not assume this was a confession from a faithful believer. Nebuchadnezzar had not converted to the Jewish faith, he was again just acknowledging God as one, maybe even the most high, of all the gods. God had not only allowed His servants to survive the burning, fiery furnace, but He had also rescued them in such a way that there was not even a hint that they had been in the furnace. They were completely untouched by the fire. Their clothes were not harmed nor their hair singed, and they did not even smell of fire. This is not a support for God caring for our clothes, or saving our material possessions. This is a testimony to how completely and comprehensively God rescues His people. The fire had no power over Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because the real Power in the universe intervened and rescued them. God is able to save, even to the uttermost. What power does the world have over you when you are a disciple of Jesus Christ? What power does sin and death have over you when you follow Jesus as Lord and Savior? There is no greater power to rescue you than Jesus Christ.

God Rescues Us For His Glory

Remember, Nebuchadnezzar had previously asked Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who is the god who could save them (v. 15). Nebuchadnezzar probably felt pretty good about himself. He probably felt like there was no man or no god who could defy his will or his command. Nebuchadnezzar probably felt that way until he saw the fourth man in the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. His tone changed dramatically. Having his question answered in a very dramatic way, Nebuchadnezzar was ready to honor God, at least in some small way. Look at the following verses.

Daniel 3:28–29 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. 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.”*

Nebuchadnezzar’s question from verse fifteen had been decisively answered. He confessed, “There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” That sounds good but it was still putting God in a list of other gods and idols. Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was not yet changed. The God of whom he spoke was still *the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*, not his own God. Nebuchadnezzar remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar believed God was good enough to reveal dreams and things of the future. Maybe Nebuchadnezzar believed God was good for saving people from a fiery furnace. But this did not mean he was worthy of complete devotion and worship as the one true God.

Nebuchadnezzar did not command his people to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Most High God, as he had commanded them to worship his own golden statue. But, he did command his people to respect the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This was good, but it was not worship. Nebuchadnezzar then promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, showing that he appreciated the integrity of these men. Nebuchadnezzar expressed his admiration for these young men because of their willingness to defy a king's command and suffer a horrible death in order to remain true to their god. Although they had angered him, he respected their faithfulness and honored them. Some people may not understand or appreciate your convictions, but they may respect you for taking a stand for what you believe. Your faithfulness can be an incredible witness to unbelievers. When you take a stand for Christ, even in the midst of certain suffering, God is gloried, and He will reward you. Stand firm for Him!

The Advent of Jesus Christ — Our True Rescue!

God often meets His people most profoundly in the “fiery furnaces of life”. What is more wonderful: That God can walk with you in a fiery furnace, or that He lives within you every day of your life? What is more miraculous: That God can save you from a fiery furnace, or that He can rescue your soul from a fiery hell? Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were powerless to save themselves, we are powerless to save ourselves from eternal separation from God. And yet, God has provided the rescue. This passage possibly predicts the coming of God in the flesh. This passage is probably one of many that reveals the pre-incarnate Christ visiting His people before His birth. Hundreds of years later after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's fiery furnace ordeal in Babylon, God came to earth, to a little town in Bethlehem, to dwell as a little baby in a manger. God came to be with His creation in order to rescue His people. Just as God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God is with us through Jesus. That is the meaning of Jesus' name, Immanuel — *God with us!* God was with the three Hebrew men in the furnace. God was with the world when He sent His Son, Jesus. He is with us now as the Holy Spirit. God is with us and rescues us through the cross of Christ.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what will you do when the heat is turned up in your life? Perhaps more importantly, who will you turn to when you face the fires in this life? Do you believe that God is with you through whatever troubles you may face? Do you trust Him to know what is best even when it means your prayers are not answered the way you want? The truth is that all of us are in trouble and need a Savior. We are all perishing, but the good news is that God has provided the Way for us to be rescued. His name is Jesus Christ! God has provided a rescue from all of the troubles in life, even the hottest, fiery furnaces. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son in order to rescue us from damnation. He then sent us His Holy Spirit to always be with us, no matter what flaming furnaces we are thrown into. The good news is that no matter what happens in this life, we have the promise of God that He is always with us and He has prepared an eternal home that is free of pain and suffering. Have you trusted in the real Rescuer? This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!