

The Image and the Furnace

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[0 : 00] I'm coming to our scripture reading now and I'm going to invite one of our congregation, Anne Norrie, to come and to read to us some verses from Daniel chapter 3.

He set it up on the plain of Jura in the province of Babylon.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent together the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counsellors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And they stood before the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every other kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

[1 : 30] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

In verse 13, Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now, if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.

But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God who shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

[3 : 07] 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, 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.

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. 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.

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace. 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. 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.

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.

[4 : 31] Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out from the fire, 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 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.

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.

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Amen.

We're working our way through the book of Daniel on Sunday mornings, and in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem, and he took a number of young men, especially from the professional classes and others, to Babylon to make Babylon into an even greater city than it was.

And so there, the Lord's people are put into exile. They're taken from the city of God, Jerusalem, and sent to exile in the city of Babylon. And so exile is a condition across the Bible.

[6 : 08] Exile is really just the state of not being where God made you to be. Exile is any time you are away from the true city of God, living in what St. Augustine called the city of man.

And so there's a sense in which we're all in exile, because we are not living in the garden city of God that he made us to live in, to dwell with him in his presence. And so until Jesus comes again, this life is an exilic life.

And the New Testament says that every single Christian, every single believer in the Lord is living in exile, living in the midst of a Babylonian age. And the question we've been asking every single week of this passage, of this book is, how does a believer in the Lord, if you're a believer today, how do you live faithfully, with wisdom, with hope, in the midst of exile, in the midst of Babylon?

Another way to say it is that to live in exile is to live in a time and an age before Jesus comes again, where you're surrounded by idolatry, where people in the city center their lives on something other than the true God.

And the Bible says that's not just a city problem, that's a problem in every human heart, that we're all struggling with that, centering our lives on something else than the real God, than the true God that made us.

[7 : 24] And that's the condition of being Babylonized or living in exile. So let me say it like this, an idol is an idol. You know you have an idol when there is anything in your life that is more important to you than God.

And you know you have an idol when there's anything in this life that absorbs your heart more than God does, that takes your imagination over more than God does. Anything that you chase after, that you want that thing to give you what only God can give you, that's idolatry.

And this is a book about that. It's a wisdom book as well. And it's a book that's saying how do you live wisely in an age where you're surrounded by idols, always being tempted and drawn back to idolatry, and you're wrestling with the idolatry in your own heart.

In Daniel chapter 1, Nebuchadnezzar put Daniel and all these folks into a formation program, and it's so that for three years they were going to be trained in the wisdom of Babylon. And instead, at the end of that story, God gave Daniel and his friends great wisdom.

And so you see from the beginning, this is a book of where does real wisdom come from? And the story tells us it's a gift from God. You've got to look to God to get wisdom.

[8 : 37] Three principles we've already looked at for how to live faithfully in the midst of a Babylonian age. I can give you them in 30 seconds. Don't worry, I won't re-preach them.

Number 1 and 2 was Daniel chapter 1, be in the world but not of it. How do you live faithfully in a Babylonian age? Be in the world but not of it. Don't separate yourself from the city. God put you here.

Seek the peace of the city. Love Edinburgh just like Daniel loved Babylon. And yet, don't be of it. Don't give your heart away. Don't assimilate. Don't give your heart to idols. Fight, resist, starve your idols to death.

Principle 3 last week, get wisdom. And wisdom is just the ability to know how to navigate such a complex world with courage, with justice, with righteousness. Let's find a fourth today.

What's the fourth principle? We'll find it through looking at the image, the furnace, and the fourth man. So first, the image. Now this is a famous story, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[9 : 38] It's a bedtime story, though it contains some pretty horrible details. I remember growing up watching the Veggie Tales version of this story. Some of you that grew up in the church may know that.

Instead of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it was Rack, Shack, and Benny. I also listened to Eric Alexander preach through Daniel as I'm studying for the series, the famous Scottish minister of the past generation.

And he said that his mother at night would say, let me tell you the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and off to bed you go. So I like that. That's good. We know that lots of people know this story, the story of the fiery furnace.

And maybe you don't, and that's okay. But because of that, we tend to make this story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. By the way, Daniel is nowhere to be found in this story. We take a pause from Daniel himself here.

And of course, this is a story about a test of faith. And the question here is, will you refuse to bow down to the golden image in the culture before you, even if it costs you everything?

[10 : 47] Would you refuse to bow down to whatever golden image the culture is putting before you, even if it's going to cost you your life? That's the clear question of the chapter, and we'll get there in just a minute. But before we get there, when you look at all the stories in Daniel, they are all actually bookended by not Daniel, not Shadrach, not Meshach, not Abednego, but Nebuchadnezzar.

He's, in some sense, the central character. And this story starts with Nebuchadnezzar and ends with Nebuchadnezzar. And we're following Nebuchadnezzar's story. As much as we are anybody else in this book.

And so, in verse 1, we find out Nebuchadnezzar makes an image of gold, whose height is 60 cubits. That's 90 feet, 9 feet wide. And there's a backstory here.

What's the backstory? That's that, if you were here last week, you'll remember that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. And in the dream, he saw an image. But in the dream, the image had a head of gold, and then a body of different materials, all the way down to clay feet.

And Daniel said, Nebuchadnezzar, God is telling you, you are the head of gold. But you've got clay feet. Your kingdom's not going to last. It was a thousand-year prophecy telling Nebuchadnezzar, you are not the climax of history.

[11 : 57] You are the greatest power of world history thus far. But you need to humble yourself before the real God. You flip over to chapter 3, and what happens? After having a dream where he was the head of gold in the dream, now he makes a statue that's 90 feet tall of all gold.

And that means that what Nebuchadnezzar's doing is he's rejecting God's prophecy. He's doubling down. He's saying, your God said, my kingdom's going to crumble.

I'm here to say, my kingdom will last forever. He turned just the head of gold from the dream that had a chest of silver, it had a core of bronze, it had legs of iron.

He's saying, no, no, no, it's gold from top to bottom. For a thousand years, my kingdom will reign. He's doubling down. He's saying, though your God says he raises up kingdoms and he casts them down, I'm saying, I will last forever.

That's what he's doing here. And that means that Nebuchadnezzar's response in this story is one where there is zero change at the level of the heart. So he's heard the prophecy.

[13 : 04] He's acknowledged it. He was called to humility. And he's saying, I reject that. And he's doubling down on his pride and saying, I will not change. It's not an intellectual issue.

It's a heart issue for him. And probably a good amount of time has passed. And he's been able to think about it. And he said, no, my kingdom is my God. And so he builds this great statue.

Now the people, if you read the commentators on this, they will ask, what is the image? That's one of the famous questions people ask about Daniel 3. What exactly is this statue? And famously, if you read through the whole text carefully, you will find that it never tells you.

It doesn't say a word about what the image actually is. What was this image? Some people go down to verse 14 and they say, when Nebuchadnezzar says, is it true of Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego that you won't bow down, you won't serve my gods or worship the golden image I've set up?

You go to a verse like that and it's saying, when these three refuse to bow down before the image, Nebuchadnezzar says, you won't worship my gods or the image. Is he saying the image was a representation of all the gods that he worshiped, all the gods of Babylon in sort of one go?

[14:17] Maybe. What that would mean is that Babylon is a pluralist society, just like Rome was, just like Edinburgh or London or New York. And that's that Nebuchadnezzar was saying, you can worship any god you want in my kingdom, but the one thing you must not do is worship one god only.

I'm coming after you because I've said, look, I don't care if you worship the Lord, Yahweh, but you better come and bow down toward all the gods as well. So they're being pressured because of pluralism.

What does pluralism say? It says, you can worship whatever god you want to in private, but when you come into public, you need to worship and bow down to the gods of the age. That's pluralism. And I think that is there, but think about the dream. What is Nebuchadnezzar doing? He's saying, Daniel, you told me it was just the head of gold, but I'm here to say it's the whole body.

And I think what the image really is, it may not literally be an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but it is at least an image of his kingdom, of all that represents him, of his glory, his power, his might, everything we talked about last week.

[15:23] If you were here, he said, you are the golden head. And Nebuchadnezzar says, no, I am the golden body. And my kingdom is going to last forever and ever. And that means, that means that the image is a visible representation of his own self-glory and his own attempt to divinize himself and make himself into a god.

And I think that this passage is trying to talk to every single one of us today and help us to realize that the essence of sin, the essence of all that is wrong in this world, is that every human heart wants to divinize itself.

And really, at the bottom of all of our souls, there is a 90-foot golden statue that says, I want to be my own god. I want to self-justify. I don't want to be saved.

I want to save myself. I don't want to bow down to the real god. I want others to bow down to me.

And Nebuchadnezzar is showing us the real essence of sin here. That's, it's self-glory.

It's playing god. I love what St. Augustine, it's hard not to quote St. Augustine a lot in this series because he wrote so much about this very issue and theme of idolatry.

[16:34] He says it like this, what is pride but a perverse desire for height? I've said that many times. What is pride but a diverse, perverse desire for height?

You know? No, of course. What does he mean by that? Not physical height. He says, what is pride but a perverse desire for height in forsaking the real god, him, to whom the soul ought to cleave?

And then he says, instead of, instead, we believe we are the beginning and the purpose of our own lives. That self-divinization, it's at the heart of all idolatry.

It's underneath the worship we give to money or power, romance, whatever it may be. It's actually that we want to be God. We want to play God. And we all build these statues in our hearts to ourselves.

Think about it, how it expresses itself, I think, in small ways all the time in our lives. Can you see yourself in this? We need to be right. We need to be able to look down our noses at the other political party, at those others for their morality, their theology, whatever it may be.

[17:44] We need to be able to catch other people making mistakes. I need to be able to catch other people making mistakes and point it out. We need to post that picture. We can't stop taking pictures and say, I need to post this picture to curate my own golden statue, the image of who I want people to think I am.

We need, we crave to say, I'm so busy. How are you? I'm so busy. Because being exhaustion by way of busyness is a badge of honor by way that we think we're more important than everybody else is because we're so busy.

We have so much to do, right? And these are just the smallest ways that you can see that there is a golden statue to ourselves, of ourselves, at the bottom of every single heart. Augustine, again, in his famous book, *The Confessions*, he tells, it's his testimony, really, his story.

And he tells the story of when he was a little kid and he was out in the forest with some other guys and he would take pears from this orchard. And he says, I would take the pears and in an age of hunger, I would not eat them.

In an age of hunger, I would not hoard them. In an age of hunger, I wouldn't stash them away for when the famine was coming from my family. He said, I stole the pears and I would just throw them on the ground. And he said, I'll just get rid of them.

[19:02] And he said, and here's how he describes it. This is a paraphrase. He said, I just wanted to do it to know I could do it. But I wanted to be able to say, I'm powerful, I'm independent, I make my own rules.

And then he writes, every sin is ultimately about the pleasure of playing God, of setting myself against divine order, against divine life, against God himself. It's the essence of sin.

It's not just an issue of bad habits in the Bible. The real issue is that really what's going on in the bottom of all of our souls is just a pride that worships self. And Nebuchadnezzar is putting that on display for us.

Now, I've got to move on. This is our long point. We have two short points. But if you remember from week one, the Tower of Babel, Genesis 11, was the beginning of the Babylonian kingdom. The Tower of Babel is proto-Babylon. It's where Babylon was first established. And there, what happened? They built this great tower to the heavens. They said, let us make a name for ourselves. And who was there?

[20:02] All the nations, all the peoples gathered around this great image. It was a collective image, a golden statue to the heavens, whereby they said, we will go to the heavens. We will make a name for ourselves.

We will slay God. Pride at the heart, the human heart of all the nations there gathered. And if you read Genesis 11 carefully, it says in a moment, it's supposed to make you laugh. I don't think many of us do when we read it.

But it says that as they built a tower to the heavens, God came down to look at it. Because it was so tiny. And he had to come all the way down to find it. It was so small.

And it's supposed to make you laugh in Genesis 11 when you read it. And what did God do? He scattered them. He confused their languages. He said, you will no longer gather as one people across the world because your pride gets so bad.

You're so self-divinizing that I can't put you all in one place together. Nebuchadnezzar, in verses 2 to 7, gathers all the nations, all the languages, all the peoples.

[21:01] He builds a great tower to the heavens. You see what's happening? He's trying to reverse Babel. Babel was proto-Babylon. Here he is in the heart of Babylon. And he's building the new tower of Babel.

But it's all about him. And he's bringing all the nations, all the languages, all the peoples together.

And if you look at verse, as Anne read for us, you look at verse 2, 3. It says that all the prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, officials came together to worship.

And then verse 3. Then the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, and all the people gathered together. It happens again down at the end. And in verse 4, it says, When you hear the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, every kind of music.

Again, when you hear the Lorne hype, well, not Lorne, whatever the musical instrument was. By the way, I don't think this is saying bagpipes are Babylonian per se. No.

When they're played from 10.30 to 11.30 on Sunday mornings outside, they are Babylonian. Every other time, they're okay. You see, in other words, as one commentator notes, the repetition, when you read it, is supposed to sound almost like a child is telling you this story.

[22:18] The prefects, the governors, they all gathered. The prefects, the governors, the satraps, they all gathered. The lyre, the bagpipe, the horn. The repetition is funny. It sounds like a silly way to write a story. And the point, just like at the Tower of Babel, is to say, Look at this silly man.

It's to say, You trying to reverse Babel when God had to scatter humanity. He came down and laughed because of your pride. And all the nations, all the languages, they're all gathered. God laughs.

But He's patient. And the question today for all of us is really this. It's trying to get us to say, Who am I that I would put myself in the place of God?

To say that I am the Lord of my own life is silly. It's silly. I didn't make myself. I'm not the point. Secondly, briefly, the furnace. Now, when you challenge the authority of a man who has built the entire world around himself, like we saw last week, he's incredibly fragile. One little poke at him. You know, all the nations can worship him, but if three men don't, he gets furious. He's very fragile. And in verse 19, it says that when they refused to bow down, his face was distorted with rage.

[23 : 30] It describes him like a beast, his face snarling with rage. And so, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel's three friends, they refused to bow down.

And obviously, the question here is, will you refuse to bow down to the golden image, whatever it is in this world, in this life, and remain faithful to God even at the threat of death, even if it's gonna cost you everything?

Will you be faithful in the midst of a Babylonian world? But it's important to put that in context for a second. The furnace is a symbol in the Bible in a couple of ways.

They're threatened. If you don't bow down, I'm gonna throw you in a fiery furnace. The furnace is a symbol. And first, it's a symbol for just that, the suffering that can come into your life because of pressure to bow down to idols.

The pressure to capitulate. The pressure to receive judgment from others because you refuse to follow the gods they follow. And that's one symbol of the furnace, the clear symbol here.

[24 : 30] And anytime God's people in the Bible are in exile, that's part of the symbolism. So Deuteronomy chapter four, verse 15 to 22 says that, Egypt was the furnace in which Israel lived.

It calls Egypt the furnace. Babylon's now the furnace. Any place where there are all sorts of gods around you and they're putting pressure on you to bow, lest you be judged, burned, destroyed. That is one image.

I think that's getting us to ask, by the way, today, if you're a believer in this room and you're walking through life in the city, working, living, and you never feel pressure, you never feel like you're faced with a hard decision that's asking you, am I going to bow to this or stand up?

If you walk through a city like Edinburgh and you never feel that pressure, it could be an indication that you're not only being in the world, but also of it, that you've already started to give over to the idols.

In other words, in a city like Babylon, a city like Edinburgh, a city like Rome, a city like New York and London, there should be pressure on us where we're always having to work with wisdom to say, what do I do in this very difficult situation at work that's calling me to sin, that's calling me to bow down before something that is not the real God?

[25 : 47] But the other way that the furnace, the other thing the furnace symbolizes in the Bible is just suffering in general. So the image of the furnace is used throughout the Bible to talk about suffering.

Think about the New Testament. When you enter into suffering, it can be a furnace to you either that refines you, smelts away the dross where you become a person of more hope, faith, and joy, or it will break you.

It will burn you. It will destroy you. Suffering has one of those two capabilities. Here's the key moment of the whole passage, the whole sermon. It's in verses 15 to 16.

And Nebuchadnezzar here says, when you are ready, you hear the sound of the music, you fall down, you worship the image that I have made. But if you don't, you will be cast into the fiery furnace.

And then he asked this question, who is the God who would deliver you out of my hands? That's the question of the passage. Who is the God who could deliver you out of the furnace?

[26 : 47] Who is the God who could deliver you out of suffering? Who is the God who could deliver you out of, even in some places, the condemnation of martyrdom, dying for standing up for your faith?

Is there a, Nebuchadnezzar saying, is there a God out there that could deliver you from that, from the furnace, from the furnace of, the fire of suffering that comes into each one of our lives? And what do they say?

In verse 17 and 18, they say, we don't need to answer this question. And then they do. If this be so, if we have to die, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us.

He's able. Okay, first they say, God is able to deliver me. God is able to deliver us from any type of suffering in this life, any type of furnace, any type of circumstance.

But then the key, verse 18, but if not, and do you see what they're saying? They say, look, we know God can save us from the fiery furnace, but he may decide not to.

[27 : 46] And we may just have to die. And that means that what they're teaching us is, they're saying, Nebuchadnezzar, we trust God for who he is, not what he gives to us.

We trust God and want God for who he is, not the benefits. We're not calling upon God and saying, well, if you were to deliver us out of suffering in a really hard circumstance out of the fire, then we might trust you.

It's saying, we trust God because he is God even if he chooses not to save us from this moment, from this circumstance. And that gives us our fourth principle of living in exile.

And it's this, to live faithfully in the midst of idolatry in a city like ours, God has to be the apple of your eye. God has to be the point.

God has to, you have to be growing into a person where it's not Christianity you follow, but God is the desire of your heart. It's not a religion that you're after, it's Jesus himself that you want.

[28 : 52] Where God is who you want, where you can say, even if I have to walk through every fire and never be rescued, God is enough for me. God is who I was made for.

God is who I actually want. And the point of this is to ask the question today, for all of us, there will come a moment where suffering will not cease. In every one of our lives, we will enter into the furnace and we will not come out of it in this life at some point.

And the question is, is the Lord enough? Is it God that you want or is it just the religion? Is he the apple of your eye in the days of your youth and in the days of old age when you're going to walk through the fire and not come out of it unscathed but burned?

Of course, there we're talking about death and every other fire that you might walk through in this life. What does Nebuchadnezzar say? He says, do you have a God who is enough to take you through the furnace?

What God could there be that could deliver you from my hands, from the furnace? Is there a God like that? I love the line, and I've heard many say it, sometimes when you enter into the furnace, that's the moment where you realize you don't know Jesus is all you have until Jesus is all you need.

[30 : 13] You don't know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. Sometimes when you enter into the furnace, there is nothing left but to say, is God enough for me?

And he is. He is what you need. See, the question, let's go to the third, the close. Nebuchadnezzar says, is there a God that could deliver you from the furnace? And we see here the fourth man.

So in verse 19, Nebuchadnezzar, he raises the temperature of the kiln, the fires, so hot, seven times hotter than even the soldiers that take these guys there die just trying to get close to it.

And then, out of the mouth of babes, after asking, is there a God who could deliver you?

Nebuchadnezzar lifts up his eyes, he looks into the furnace, and he says, did we not cast three men into the fire?

But I see a fourth who has the appearance like a son of the gods, verse 24 and 25. And then he says in verse 28, God delivered you, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[31 : 17] God sent his angel to deliver you, to deliver his servants. Now, who is this, this fourth? One like the son of the gods, one in an appearance like a son of the gods.

And then Nebuchadnezzar himself says he is an angel. In Genesis 18, three men showed up to Abraham's door, and it said, one of the three was the angel of the Lord, and Abraham bowed down and worshiped him.

In Exodus chapter 3, there was a bush burning, consumed a thicket and flames on top of Mount Sinai. And in Exodus 3, it said, out of the bush that was burning, yet not consumed, walked the angel of the Lord.

He, in the midst of the flames, yet not consumed. And you come to Daniel chapter 3, and you realize that this is the angel of the Lord, one who entered into the fire but was never consumed, just like Exodus 3.

And that means with the church for 2,000 years, we say today that this is a pre-incarnate manifestation and condescension of the Son of God Himself.

[32 : 27] This is the one who would take on flesh as Jesus Christ in the Gospels, walking through the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And Nebuchadnezzar asked, is there one like the Son of, is there a God, I should say, who will deliver you out of the furnace?

And here we see that the Son of God who walked through the fire, yet was not consumed in the Old Testament, is the very Son of God who chose to enter the fire and be consumed for us at the cross. Why? So that we could be rescued from our little golden statues at the bottom of our hearts. The very one who delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in this moment is the one who was so consumed by the fires of hell for you at the cross so that He could rescue you from the golden statue that you worship of self.

And you see how much Jesus Christ solves the great dilemmas we face in this story. When He went to the cross, He was burned. He went to hell itself for us so that the judgment our self-glorification deserves would die with Him.

He can rescue you from all your pride and forgive you for that. But then, you know, think about it. Through this furnace, the very thing Nebuchadnezzar needed so much in his life that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had, he never had.

[33 : 45] And that's this, a relationship with God that can secure you in this life. You know, when Jesus goes to be burned in the fires of the cross, He makes a way so that you can know God, have a relationship with God, make God the point of your life so that when you enter the fire of suffering, you'll not be burned ultimately.

Isaiah 43 is all about this. What does it say? With Him, you can walk through every fire and not be burned. How? Because you know that you've got the one you were made for.

You've got Him, God. And if the next event of suffering takes everything from you, and it's going to one day, one day the suffering will come that will take everything that we know in this life, you've got the God for whom you were made.

And when that day comes, because Jesus is all you have, you will realize Jesus is all I need. That's what the cross does for us. And the third thing it does for us is it changes the meaning of suffering in your life now.

Suffering in this life can be, the New Testament says, a refiner's fire. You know, it can melt the vices in our lives and bring out faith, hope, and love. Actually, the surprising word of the New Testament, suffering can bring you joy.

[35 : 00] Whoa. And how? Because when you have Jesus, when you are walking through the fire with the one who appears here, like the, oh, Nebuchadnezzar said, like the son of the gods, he is the son of God.

When you walk through the fire with him, he actually gives you the ability to take on joy in suffering, to be refined instead of just a crumble. Modern Western people do not, we do not collectively, sociologically suffer very well.

We live lives of comfort and abundance and we don't expect to suffer and so it's so tough for us when we do suffer. But of course, we know it's coming. And this passage tells you about the only way to get through it and that's to make the Lord himself the apple of your eye.

He's got to be the one you desire. You got to ask God, help me desire you, want you more than anything else and I'll close with this word. Remember I said at the beginning that the bookends of this story are all about Nebuchadnezzar.

It's been that way all throughout and you come back at the end of this chapter to Nebuchadnezzar and at the very end of the story it says, Nebuchadnezzar said, your God really is a God, really is God and blessed be the name of your God and you start to think, is Nebuchadnezzar beginning to get it?

[36 : 16] God has been speaking to him over and over again. We'll see that especially next week. But then in the next verse Nebuchadnezzar says, now if anybody fails to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they are to be torn limb to limb.

Okay, so you realize he didn't get it again and of course again he made it all about himself again and he just inserted the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into his golden statue picture and said, okay, well now that's the God we'll worship but it's ultimately about my power and glory so I'll rip your limbs off if you don't do it.

He didn't repent and what's on offer today for some of us in this room for the first time but for all of us again is to recognize and ask the question, can you say I am a self-divinizing worshiper of the

golden image of my own self-glory in the bottom of my soul?

Can you say that? Can you say that is me? That is who I am. I exist to worship me and I know it and I struggle with it and I don't want it anymore and I want to be rescued from it and I love what Martin Lloyd-Jones says.

He says, the trouble with many of us is that we've not really repented. We've been convicted of sins but not of sin. We've been convicted of lots of little things we've done and we've said I've made mistakes.

[37 : 32] That was a bad point of my life. I struggled with that then or I struggle with this today but he says this, we're sorry for the things we've done but we have to be sorry for what we are.

For who we are. Self-divinizing, self-worshipping people that stand against the living God and the last word is this. The irony of this story is that Nebuchadnezzar almost definitely sends Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego into the fiery furnace, the very furnace that he used to forge the golden image. This is the furnace that he made the idol out of that he sends them into and instead of vindicating his idol in this moment, the furnace exposes his powerlessness.

The very place that he chose to build an image of himself to worship is the place where God upstaged him and demonstrates that God is the true God not Nebuchadnezzar and that means that this furnace is not only an image of suffering, it's an image of Nebuchadnezzar's heart.

The fire burning at your heart Nebuchadnezzar is an idol but God is coming into his heart you see and saying you're exposed, repent, bow down, cast the image down, worship the real God.

[38 : 47] Let me ask you today, will you do that? Can you say that? I'm self-divinizing but I don't want that anymore. I want to be rescued. And cast down all the images and bow your knee to the real God.

He'll give you everything. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for this story, famous story, how powerful it is and we pray now that you would expose our idols of self and give us a far better hope and that's to know you, to be with you, to walk through fire with you, to have you as the apple of our eye, the true joy of our hearts.

So do that work in us now as we sing in Christ's name. Amen.