

## Sermon for Reformation Sunday

**Text: Daniel chapter 3**

**Preached on 10-28-2007**

### **Introduction:**

Last Sunday wind-driven wildfires started burning throughout Southern California. In the following days over 900,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes threatened by at least 16 wildfires driven by relentless Santa Anna winds. Over 8,000 firefighters from across California were called upon to battle the out of control, constantly shifting fires. This tragedy has been described as a “perfect storm” of weather conditions causing a worst-case fire scenario, killing at least 14 people (as of Friday afternoon) and blackening some 800 square miles of Southern California. As some of the evacuees returned to their neighborhoods this past week, they found only ashes where their homes once stood.

Without a doubt, fire is one of the most destructive forces known to man. King Nebuchadnezzar knew this full well. He used the threat of fire to force obedience and conformity upon his people. Despite the king’s decrees and threats, however, three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were determined to obey God rather than some earthly king. Knowing that the king wouldn’t hesitate to carry out his threat, they trusted that by Grace through Faith they could be...

### **Theme: Rescued from the Fiery Furnace!**

#### **Part I: Earthly kings throw us to the flames**

#### **Part II: The King of kings brings us through the flames**

#### **Part I: Earthly kings throw us to the flames**

People today often have a short memory. People in ancient times did too, as we see from King Nebuchadnezzar. When Daniel interpreted the king’s dream (**chapter 2**), Nebuchadnezzar learned that his empire would collapse and be followed by a succession of other kingdoms, and that finally God would set one up that would be an everlasting, indestructible kingdom. Unfortunately, the dream and its solemn message made no lasting impression on Nebuchadnezzar. He had more than just a weak memory. He had a sinful pride.

Against better knowledge, King Nebuchadnezzar proudly continued to worship false gods. Worst still, he used his God-given authority as king to try and turn people’s attention away from the true God. By doing so, he insulted the God who had made him king in the first place. Ignoring

what God had to say through His prophet, Nebuchadnezzar passed a royal decree that required all the people of his kingdom to bow down before a 90 foot gold-plated image (or idol). Doing so would be a resounding oath of loyalty to the gods of Babylon, as well as to the king himself. Anyone who refused to bow down and worship this statue would be considered guilty of treason. The penalty? To be thrown to the flames!

**Application:**

There must have been many who bowed down only from the instinct of self-preservation, thinking, “You do what you have to do to stay alive. There are many people today who would agree with that, and who ask, “After all, isn’t that the most important thing in life – staying alive?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were convinced that there is a higher goal in life than staying alive. But they weren’t the only ones. On July 6, 1415 John Huss was asked to recant (or take back) his writings in order to save his life. Huss declined by saying, “God is my witness that I have never taught that of which I have been accused by false witnesses. In the truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached I will die today with gladness!” Then the fire was lit under his feet. He was burned at the stake.

Could you face a fire like that? Could I? I don’t know the answer, but I do know this: God did not show anymore love to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego than He did to John Huss or you and me. Where shall we begin? Should we begin in Jerusalem, where Jesus endured the Hell and anguish of the cross in order to make full and sufficient payment for our sin? Should we begin at the baptismal font, where God the Holy Spirit knocked down the dividing wall of sin and unbelief in our hearts to make us His own? Should we begin at this communion rail, where Jesus comes to us directly to give us His very body and blood for the continued strengthening of our faith? Or should we begin right here, in the Bible, where we discover the only true God and all that He has done to save us through Jesus Christ? If the day ever comes when we have to face some “fire” (either real fire or something that brings emotional pain, grief, and sadness) for confessing Jesus Christ, only God’s love, knowing that our sins ARE forgiven and that Heaven IS ours, can give us the strength, confidence, and courage to stand up for what we believe in and to boldly defend the honor of the God THAT SAVED US from the unquenchable fires of Hell!

**Transition:**

Talk about being *Rescued from the Fiery Furnace!* Although earthly kings will always be more than willing to throw us to the flames, we can trust that by Grace through Faith...

### **Part II: The King of kings brings us through the flames**

How natural it would have been for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to argue, “All the king is asking is for us to devote our loyalty to him. That isn’t so bad. It’s certainly better than being thrown to the flames. God will understand. After all, won’t we be able to do more for God if we’re alive than if we’re burned to a crisp?” Yes, they could have argued this way, but they didn’t! They realized that the goal of life is not to stay alive, but to glorify God while alive. These three young believers realized there was no way to bow down in front of an idol to the glory of God. If they had given in, they would have given God a gigantic slap in the face. Not wanting to disgrace the only God that saves made their decision easy.

Still, King Nebuchadnezzar did not want to lose three promising young officials. So he offered them one final opportunity to save their lives. He said, **“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 the blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand”** (v. 15)? They answered, **“The God we serve is able to save us from it”** (v. 17). This made Nebuchadnezzar steaming mad. He ordered the three men to be thrown helpless into a raging inferno. Tied hand and foot, they had fallen to the floor of the furnace, ready to die for their faith. But suddenly a realization dawned on them. They weren’t dead! They were no longer tied! And most wonderful of all: They weren’t alone! God had sent one of His holy angels to protect them. Although this could have been the Angel of the Lord, namely Jesus, we cannot know for certain. Nevertheless, the point remains the same: God brought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego safely through the flames.

### **Application:**

In 1521 Emperor Charles V summoned Martin Luther to appear before a meeting of German princes in hopes of ending religious differences and thereby restoring conformity and unity to the Holy Roman Empire. After prayerfully thinking over his answer, Luther said, “Unless you can prove from the Bible that I have made wrong statements, I cannot and I will not take back anything. My conscience is bound by the Word of God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!”

This response meant that Martin Luther was as good as dead. Having defied Charles V, it was common knowledge that anyone had the right to kill Martin Luther at first sight. Still, Luther lived on for over 25 years. How is this possible? Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God had also brought Martin Luther through his personal fire.

We too have personal “fires” that ignite around us from time to time. Can we expect God to bring us through them all? Can we expect Him to save us when the flames get really hot? Where will you be when you take your stand? Who will be the emperor (or king) you face? Will it be a fiancée or spouse who refuses to care about your relationship with Jesus? Will it be a child or grandchild who won’t give up a life of defiant sin? Will it be suffering a severe stroke or other affliction? Will it be the emotional pain and anxiety brought on by severe depression? Yes, we face all sorts of “fires” in life. No matter how severe or hot they get, however, we have a King who brings us through each and every one of them: Jesus Christ. I say that because Jesus HAS freely delivered us from the most agonizing fire of all: Hell.

**Conclusion:**

This past week I spent considerable time viewing all kinds of pictures and footage of the firestorms raging through Southern California. As unbelievable as those images were, I knew they were very real. I saw their destructive force with my own eyes. I watched how they destroyed homes and lives. It was pretty humbling.

As the investigation into the cause of these fires continues, we do not need to investigate the cause of our personal “fires.” The Bible tells us that as long as SIN remains in the world bad things will continue to happen. Whether its wildfires burning up the Southern California coastline, a personal injury that prevents you from working, a foreclosure on your home, or any number of other things, the “fires” of life are inescapable! The only way to combat them is by going back to the source of our forgiveness and salvation. That is Jesus Christ! Although (1) earthly kings throw us to the flames, (2) the King of kings brings us through the flames. By Grace through Faith we trust that we HAVE BEEN *Rescued from the Fiery Furnace!* Amen!