

Daniel Series Part 6

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we outlined how we were going to consider the third chapter of Daniel, namely the manner in which as the account progresses we are witnesses as God is challenged, honored, and vindicated.

This morning we considered the first and second of these elements within the chapter, and we drew some lessons from the lawmakers, the law keepers, and the law breakers introduced to us in the first half of the chapter.

Now this evening we want to proceed to consider how God is vindicated. It's very clear that He is vindicated. Nebuchadnezzar, who had challenged God, who had laid down the gauntlet as it were, who had declared, what God can save you from my hands?

It is the same Nebuchadnezzar, who is then able to declare it in verse 28, Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angels 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. So God is vindicated.

[1 : 22] Now, as we consider a little bit this matter, I think the first and foremost point to be made is that it is God who vindicates Himself.

Nebuchadnezzar had rashly and foolishly chosen to challenge God's authority, and God responded in vindicating power.

The means that God chose was the deliverance of His servants. And I want us to give some thought this evening to three aspects of this deliverance.

God was vindicated in the deliverance of His servants, and now let's consider three aspects of that deliverance. And as we consider each in turn, and I'll mention what they are in a moment, we will first consider the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace.

And then move on and consider God's dealings with and deliverance of His people in the history of redemption as it is illustrated by the deliverance from the furnace.

[2 : 28] I hope as we proceed that will make sense. The three aspects that we will be noting are as follows concerning the deliverance by which God vindicates Himself.

The first aspect is that it is a deliverance that is in rather than from the trial, in rather than from the furnace. We'll see that in a moment.

The second aspect that we want to notice is that it is a deliverance that is hands-on and personal. And finally, a deliverance that is powerful and complete.

Let's think first of all of that first aspect of the deliverance that is wrought for these men by God, a deliverance that is in rather than from.

First of all, if we think of the account before us of the furnace. Now the point that is being made here is a simple one, and we won't dwell on it. The simple point is this, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not spared from the furnace, but were accompanied in, and of course ultimately delivered from the furnace.

[3 : 39] But they were cast into the furnace. They were not spared that furnace experience, if we want to call it that. They were delivered in rather than from, though of course ultimately also from.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego broke the law. We were thinking a lot this morning about this law, this decree. And they broke the law. They did not bow down.

And so they had to pay the consequences. As we sometimes hear, if you do the crime, well you have to do the time. Well they did the crime, and so they had to do the time.

But it is interesting to notice that even while they are in the furnace, they enjoy a liberty unknown to their oppressors. The manner which is described as they are in the furnace is, I think, quite instructive and revealing.

In verse 25 we've read the verse. Let's just notice again what it says. He said, look, Nebuchadnezzar is speaking, describing what he says. Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

[4 : 49] This picture of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their mysterious friend, walking unbound and unharmed in the fire. For me, I don't know if this is idle speculation, but for me it kind of conjures up an image that is almost Eden-like.

Of Adam walked in the garden with God. There they are. They're in the furnace, and yet they enjoy in the furnace, even in the furnace, They seem to enjoy greater liberty than the contorted figure of Nebuchadnezzar, who in his rage, we're told that even his facial features are contorted in the fury that grips him and enslaves him.

He is more a slave. He is more enchained, Nebuchadnezzar, outside of the furnace, than these men walking unbound, unharmed, within the furnace.

These men are delivered in the furnace, rather than from the furnace in the first instance. But as we move on from the furnace, and we move on to the history of redemption, and the history of God's dealings with his people, as it is in a way illustrated by the account before us, well, we notice that in God's dealings with his people, with us, in history, a similar pattern is observed.

We, as Christians, as believers, are not spared from this evil world in which we live, but we are promised to be kept in the world.

[6 : 22] And perhaps more to the point, we are not ordinarily kept from trials, but accompanied and given grace to withstand in the midst of trials.

This is God's ordinary way with his people, not to deliver us from the trial, not to ensure that we face no trials, but in the midst of the trial, in the furnace, in the dark long night, he is with us, and he gives us grace to remain standing.

This is God's ordinary way. Maybe some of you are going through trials. Maybe you know of loved ones going through trials. I think many of us are very concerned and have been over these last days concerning our brother, David Robertson, there in Dundee, how he's been struck down by this illness and is there in intensive care.

A faithful servant of God, and yet is he spared trials? No, a very profound and deep trial for him and his family, not spared that furnace experience.

And yet we believe and trust that God grants to him grace to withstand in the midst of his trial. And of course, we accompany him and pray for him that he would indeed know and experience that grace to withstand.

[7 : 44] And of course, also we pray the healing hand of God, restoring him and delivering him through this trial. But if we think of the matter that is more specific and to the point concerning the chapter, we think of the matter of disobedience to ungodly laws.

This morning we were thinking more on that matter. But if we think of that, if we think of the prospect that we may be required to disobey ungodly laws here in Scotland, let's be very clear that it's very unlikely.

That God would choose to miraculously deliver us from doing the time when we find ourselves duty-bound to disobey ungodly laws.

But what we can be sure of is that God will grant us the grace to withstand. And it has always been so. We think of Paul and Silas singing in their chains there as they were cast into the deepest dungeon of a Roman jail.

We think today of Pastor Youssef in a cell in Tehran, awaiting day after day, week after week, what the final word concerning his fate will be.

[9 : 01] And yet waiting in quiet trust upon God, not spared from the trial, but accompanied and delivered in the trial.

This is the first aspect of God's vindicating deliverance that we notice. But there's a second aspect that I mentioned at the beginning that I want to move on to now, and that is that this deliverance is a hands-on deliverance, a personal deliverance.

First of all, let's think of the furnace. What do we mean by describing God's deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as hands-on and personal? What we mean by that is simply that God Himself intervenes to save these men.

Notice how it is described for us in the chapter in verses 24 and 25. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, Weren't there three men that we tied up and

threw into the fire?

They replied, Certainly, O King. He said, Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

[10:18] As we think of God's personal engagement with these men, of His personal hands-on deliverance of these men, what do these verses give us insight in that regard into?

Well, the big question, of course, that has occupied the minds of many is the identity of this mysterious fourth man there in the fire that Nebuchadnezzar is able to see.

Who is this man? Who is this mysterious figure like a son of the gods? Well, in answering the question, we have to see what the information is that we are given. What are we told about this man?

Really, all that we are told are the words of Nebuchadnezzar, who describes them in two ways. There, in the verses that we've read, he describes this mysterious figure as one who is like a son of the gods.

Like a son of the gods. Then, subsequently, in verse 30, Nebuchadnezzar again describes this figure, and he describes him in a slightly different way.

[11:27] There, he speaks of him as an angel. The angel that God had sent to rescue Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

In verse 28, rather, we see that. Who has sent his angel and rescued his servants. So, these are the words that Nebuchadnezzar himself uses to describe this mysterious fourth man in the furnace. And no further identification is explicitly provided for us. And so, as we limit ourselves, as I think we ought to, to the language itself, what we can say and what we are able to say with confidence is that this figure was some kind of divine or supernatural or angelic figure.

Indeed, even the first term that Nebuchadnezzar uses, like a son of the gods, could have that idea of an angelic figure. Let's remember that even the language that we have here in English, translated from Aramaic, is language that originally would have been spoken by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylonian that was then translated for our benefit into Aramaic.

I say for our benefit, but so that others would then translate into English. And so, it's really dangerous to get too clever, as it were, in terms of saying, well, what do these words mean? What we can say is that this mysterious figure was in some way divine, supernatural, angelic.

[13:00] But of course, we are intrigued, are we not? And we say, but who is he? And it is the case that in history and many have been quick to identify the fourth man as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate form.

And maybe that understanding or that tendency to identify this figure as the Lord Himself has been reinforced by what I think can only be described as an unhelpful rendering of the original Aramaic in the King James Version that many of us were brought up with, where there the figure is actually described as one who is like the Son of God.

And indeed, even with capital letters Son and God. And so, of course, if that is what you read, then it is not surprising that one would quickly say, well, yes, this is Jesus, this is the Lord.

Perhaps in a similar vein as we try and identify who this figure is, this figure might be and has been identified as the mysterious angel of the Lord who makes occasional and intriguing appearances in the Old Testament.

And, of course, then we have the task of saying, well, who is the angel of the Lord? And different views are held on that, but we won't go down that road this evening. Now, these suggestions as to who this mysterious figure is may be right.

[14:30] It may indeed be the case that who we have here is Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate form. That may be so. But I think we are unable, and I certainly feel unable, to make a definitive identification of who this figure is.

But having recognized that or having confessed my ignorance in terms of being altogether sure as to who he might be, I do think that there is a more important question than who he is, and the question is, what does he teach us, his presence?

What does the appearance of the fourth man tell us about God's deliverance? Well, this fourth man, if we can describe him that way, whoever he is, most certainly and assuredly represents God.

And his presence there in the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego declares very clearly and very eloquently that God is present personally with his faithful servants.

I think this is the key truth. Regardless of who we might consider this man was, regardless of whether we feel able or unable to identify who he is with certainty, what is certainly true is that his presence signals to us and certainly signal to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that their God was with them, that their God was a hands-on God, that their God did not look on, concerned, but perhaps impotent from afar.

[16:06] No, he comes and involves himself in their trial and he is there with them. This deliverance that vindicates God is hands-on and personal.

It was so in the furnace and it is so, of course, in the history of God's dealings with his people, in the history of God's redemptive dealings with his people. God has ever been present with his people. He was present in the desert as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as he delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. He was present with Elijah as that still small voice and he was present with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

as the mysterious fourth man in the furnace. But the truth of God as a hands-on God in the deliverance of his people finds most glorious expression in the person of Jesus Christ.

God, in the person of his Son, became flesh and he dwelt among us. He came alongside us and walked with us.

[17:21] He came alongside us in the furnace that is this sin-sick world in which we live. He was exposed to the fury of Satan and all the temptations known to man yet without sin.

but Jesus did not only come alongside us at the incarnation. That itself is a glorious truth that the Son of God, that the Word would become flesh, that he would dwell amongst us.

That is a glorious truth. But Jesus did more. In his death he took our place in the mother of all furnaces. At Calvary, Jesus no longer accompanies his people.

He stands in our place. No longer accompanying us. No, we're not there. He alone is there. He goes beyond accompanying. He goes beyond simply dwelling with us and experiencing this life. No, he goes beyond that. And he stands in our place. the searing judgment of God on our sin is poured out on Jesus as he dies alone and abandoned.

[18:37] And so, the presence of God with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace stands in stark and sobering contrast to the abandonment experienced by Jesus in the furnace of dying and death in the place of sinners in our place.

Jesus experienced abandonment that we might be spared such God-forsakenness. He hung alone that we might ever know the near presence of God.

And today, today, yes, today for us as God's people, God remains a hands-on and personal God. By His Spirit, He not only stands alongside us in our trials and tribulations but dwells with us, granting us grace in time of trial.

You are not alone. Whatever the trouble might be, however deep, however intense it might be, you are not alone.

If we think of the fleeting football stars at Anfield, they're assured on a weekly basis by thousands of adoring fans that they will never walk alone.

[19:56] They run onto the pitch and as they run through the tunnel there's that sign so famous, this is Anfield. And as they make their way onto the field, the crowd sing, you'll never walk alone, you'll never walk alone.

But you know, they will. They will walk alone. Soon, they will be too old, too old to grace the hallowed turf and younger stars will take their place and the generation that passes will soon be forgotten.

No longer will they hear those words and they will have to walk alone. But you, Christian friend, you will never walk alone.

In every fiery furnace, in the long, dark night of doubt or despair, in the gnawing agony of grief and loss, you will not walk alone.

You will never walk alone. Because your God is a hands-on God, a personal God. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is with you, He is with me.

[21:06] So you will never walk alone. But just for a moment, before we move on to the final aspect of this vindicating deliverance, just for a moment, allow me to pause and ask, is He your God?

Not enough to recognize Him as the God of Daniel, not enough to recognize Him as the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar did that. He did that. Your God, O Daniel,

your God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

What a great God He is. What a powerful God He is. He was not able to say, My God. And as He was not able to say, My God, He would not experience this near presence of God in His trials and in His tribulations.

And so I ask again the question, is this God your God? Has God become your God and Father as you have placed your trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Savior?

So we have a deliverance that is in rather than from the trial. We have a deliverance that is hands-on and personal, but finally, we have a deliverance that is powerful and complete.

[22 : 25] Again, as we think of the furnace experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we read in verses 26 and 27 what the final outcome was. 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 and the satraps, priests, governors, and royal advisors crowded around them. There's a certain delicious irony here.

All these men who had been groveling in the mud in front of the statue, now they're crowding around the opening of the furnace. And then what do we read? They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their head singed, their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

This deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, a powerful deliverance even from the fury of the furnace, heated seven times its normal temperature.

Such is the power, the delivering power of God that He can deliver His servants from this furnace. But also the picture is not only of powerful deliverance, but of complete deliverance.

[23 : 44] Not a hair on their head would singe. Not even the aroma of smoke on their clothes. Complete deliverance from the furnace.

But as we move from the furnace to the history of redemption, the history of God's dealing with His people and indeed with us, in our own personal histories as believers, we also witness and experience the deliverance of God as powerful and complete.

Such is His power that He delivers us from death itself. We who were once dead in trespasses and sin as we all were by nature, delivered by the power of God and God breathed into us new spiritual life that we might be born again to new life, life in all its fullness.

A powerful deliverance from the abject condition in which we found ourselves. But not only powerful, but His deliverance is complete.

Now, as we recognize the completeness of God's deliverance of His people, we do recognize that the completeness of His delivering work is still for us a future reality.

[25 : 07] Today, we know very well, we all know, today we still struggle in sin, we often stink of sin, but there is a day coming when He will complete the work that He has begun.

There is a day coming when we will be brought through and out of the refining fire that is this life and we will be granted a resurrection body free from even the slightest whiff of sin or corruption.

For His deliverance is complete and it will be completed in His time and in His way. So, God is vindicated in the deliverance of His servants, a deliverance that is in the trial rather than from it, a deliverance that is hands-on and personal, a deliverance that is powerful and complete.

And as we draw things to a close, I leave you with one final question. Where do you stand in this matter? Do you stand with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as one who has and is experiencing the deliverance of God in your life?

Or are you like Nebuchadnezzar, a witness who only observes and is impressed by the work of God in others?

[26 : 34] I leave you with that question to ponder on. Let us pray.