

Daniel 3:17

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[0:00] Let's turn again to Daniel chapter 3, the words we find from verse 17. Daniel 3 and verse 17.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O King.

But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

Now all of you know the background, I suppose, to this incident.

The king set up his great gold statue. It was a massive and hugely expensive and ornate erection.

[1:06] And he commanded all the peoples of his great empire to fall down and worship it. Now this wasn't a naive act of some primitive.

It was a calculated political act on the part of a great military genius.

It was part of his policy to unify his empire by imposing upon it a common religion.

And indeed, that has been a feature of the policies of many of the great tyrants of history.

We've seen that in the century under Adolf Hitler, who turned in the Christian church into a department of state.

[2:09] And we see it too in modern Islamic lands, where religion, with the faith of the people, becomes an instrument of tyrannical policy.

Where the state sets itself up as the arbiter of religion, and in that way assumes the role of God.

But Nebuchadnezzar ran into a difficulty. He ran into the faith and courage of three young men, prepared to defy the state in the name of God.

And they simply said, no, O.G. And their story affords great lessons right down to the present day.

And I want to look at the main movements of this narrative, just for a moment tonight. I want first of all to look at the statement we find in verse 17.

[3:33] The God we serve is able to save us. The God we serve. These men are standing on trial for the lies before the king.

And they say to the king, we don't need to defend ourselves. They were saying in a way, what's the point of trying to explain to you the reasons for behaving as we do.

But we want you to know that the God we serve can save us from this furnace. Even though behind you, there's all the power of this great army, and all the wealth of this great empire.

And even though this furnace is so intensely hot. And even though we are so few, and we are so weak.

Yet our God. The God who is on our side. And the God whom we serve. That God is able to save us.

[4:59] And the God who is on our side. And the laying down a principle, are they not? Of permanent and universal validity. That God is always able to save us people.

No matter how hot the furnace. Our God is able to save. And time and again in the course of the Bible's history, we find that principle so abundantly vindicated.

We saw it in the story of the Exodus, where the Church of God is caught between the Red Sea and the huge Egyptian army, and their plight seems utterly and totally hopeless.

But they learned that their God was able to save them. We find that through the case of Peter and John, thrown into prison, and yet God's angel opens their prison doors.

We see Paul and Cyrus, we see them in prison in Philippi. And God sends an earthquake and gives them their freedom.

[6:30] Our God is able to save. And we find it too, in the history of the Church of God, how time and again, God's people have found themselves in moments of terrible and hopeless peril.

And they've cried. And God has heard their cry. And God has saved. Remember how, the Great Covenanting, hero Sandy Peden, as he, head on the moors from, clever houses dragoons in the south west of Scotland, how they used to pray, Lord, cast the lap of thy cloak over poor old Sandy. And there would come God's mist, as Peter called it, and he would escape from the dragoons. Our God is able to save. And haven't you known it for yourselves? When you have found yourselves in some fearful pit, you have found yourselves in the depths, and you have cried to God. Times in your eyes, when deep has called upon deep, and one calamity has seemed to summon another.

[8:17] Time when you have found yourself a prisoner of circumstances beyond your control, and where no strength, or wisdom, or complicity, or courage of yours could affect deliverance.

And you have cried to God, and you have known that your God is able to save.

And maybe tonight, there is someone here, walking through a darkness, in which there is no light, in some fearful pit, where there is no foothold.

And all you can do is cry. And you need to know that the God you serve is able to save.

And I want you to cling to it. I want you to know that your God is indeed able to rescue you, whatever your circumstances.

[9:31] To grant deliverances, where no deliverance seems possible. To grant resolution, where the problem seems insoluble.

It is a great word. But I want you to turn now to an even greater word.

To the word in the verse that follows. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods, or worship the image of gold you have set up.

Even if he does not. Even if he does not. How marvelous it is. Our God is able to save.

And our God is always, always, everywhere, able to save. There is no furnace from which God cannot rescue.

[10:40] There is no darkness that God cannot scatter. No enemy, no adversary that God cannot overwhelm. Yet God is saying to me, yes, that you must face the possibility that I may not deliver.

And that sometimes I don't rescue. And sometimes I don't save. And I don't give the answers that my people expect.

God is always able. But sometimes God doesn't answer. And sometimes God doesn't send the miracle.

And sometimes God doesn't grant the rescue. And that's the real glory of the position of these three young men.

Not simply the moralist faith which asserts that our God is able to save. But the superabundant faith that saves.

[11:59] Even if our God does not save. We will still love him. And still worship and adore him. And still abide by him.

God can save us. But sometimes God has his own reasons for not saving.

There are some possible renderings of this passage which suggest that what the writer said was, what these men said was, even if he is not able to save.

Sometimes in the plan that God has. In the arrangements to which God has committed. The cup cannot pass from us.

And sometimes God's purpose cannot be fulfilled consistently with his granting to us the answer that we want.

[13:08] Our God is able to save. But even if he does not save, we will love him. Even if he is not able to save, we will love him.

Maybe tonight as we cry to God, we have to face in our own hearts the possibility that God will not grant us deliverance.

And we must then struggle and strive to reach the heights of attainment of a faith of his kind, which said our loyalty and our following of God does not depend on us giving us the answers that we want.

Sometimes in the Bible, God did not rescue.

Remember what happened to Isaiah. Remember what happened to James, the brother of John, slain by Herod with a sword.

[14:24] And all those martyrs in the early church from Stephen onwards. God was able to save.

But God did not. God died. And yet they died with his name and his praise on their lips.

And in April 1945, at Flossenbug concentration camp, only days before it was liberated by the American army, those two or four days before the moment of liberation, Bonhoeffer walked deliberately and steadfastly and surrendered his life on a Nazi and Gestapo gallows. The man of exquisite sensitivity, of vivid imagination, of great insight, of even greater courage. feeling that gray April morning, that his life had been but a meaningless fragment. God was able to save them. But God didn't. He knelt with his fellow victims. [16:59] And they prayed. And then, it was all. Their God was able to save.

How they must have asked, Lord, what on earth is happening?
What in God's name is going on? may may may may may may may may may may may may
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to the core of our being.

Our God is able to say, will you lay hold on that? But I want you even more to hold on to this, even if He does not.

[20:02] I want you to hang on to this. Our God is able to say, but even if He does not, we will not serve your gods.

And this is it again, so magnificent and so beautiful. We see that King Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, And there were three men, wasn't it?

I am seeing those who thawed into that furnace. That furnace, that furnace so hot. It killed in a moment the soldiers who opened the door to throw them in.

They are alive, they are loose, they are walking about. But the amazing thing is, there is a fourth or somebody else in there. There is a fourth man, he said.

The language of incomprehension. And yet he spoke great for many new. Because indeed God was in that furnace with his children.

And the son of God was with them. In their suffering and in their pain. I see a fourth man. And I want you always to know about the fourth man.

[22 : 26] To know that there is always a fourth man. There is always the presence of God with the three. So that those three are four.

Before I come back again to Sandy Pedern. He said to the church of God once. If there is one of you, he said.

He will be the second. And where there are two of you. He will be the third. And you will never want company.

You will never want company. There is always this one. Who is like a son of the gods. This divine one.

This son of God. This one you see. Who himself cried in Gethsemane. Let this cup pass from me.

[23 : 28] This one with you. From whom the cup did not pass. This one whom God did not save.

This one who allowed. Whose life was allowed. To expire in the shame. And in the pain.

And in the darkness. The darkness. Of the cross of Calvary. And he was there with them. And he is always there. I am with you all the days.

To the end of the world. The presence. This presence. This presence. This presence. Which is a sense.

Of the nearness of God. Which for some of you. Has sometimes. Has sometimes. Been a palpable. And. A felt.

[24 : 30] Thing. This. Presence. Which is. God strengthening you. In the inward man. That presence. Which is. The peace of God. Which is. The peace of God.

That passes all understanding.

Filling. And keeping. Your hearts. And your minds. You never. Want company. Let us.

Try to cling to it. Always. The fourth man. I read some months ago.

Thing that. Gripped me. And hurled me. The story. Of a young man.

[25 : 31] Terminally. You. Close. To the end. And he said this. I want. To be alive.

When I die. He didn't. Meant. That. He wanted. To survive. Death. In terms. Of. His soul's. Immortality.

Not that. But you know. He wanted. To die. To die. Livingly. He wanted. To suffer. Energetically. To take. His pain.

Dynamically. I want. To be alive. When I die. Sometimes. It is so overwhelming. So paralyzing.

Sometimes. Overwhelming. And so paralyzing. It is so overwhelming.

And so paralyzing. Sometimes. when I die. Sometimes it is so overwhelming, so paralyzing.

Sometimes it's deathless prayer, sometimes it stupefies, sometimes it makes thought impossible.

[26 : 46] That's why we need the fourth man. We need this presence of the one who was not saved, so that by the energy of his company we die livingly and we suffer energetically and suffer dynamically, not simply personally. It really, really is not the waters going over the soul. It is the triumph of the crucified and in him the triumph of his people. It is a possibility and I do not condemn you if you do not rise to the level of that possibility because I can't rise to it. But it is not a great vision, the vision of what is possible through the fourth man, that in that fire we may be free and in that fire we may walk and in that fire we may be simply beautiful like sons and daughters of God.

And then I see this, I see at the end of the Bechadnetzer saying to us somewhere our own verse 28, praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

So aren't there four great things there? Our God is able to save us. That is always the first thing.

And then secondly, that even if he does not, we will still love him and still serve him. And then the third thing, the mystery of the fourth man. And then the last thing, the fourth thing, praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

And I want to link that with the closing words of the second last verse, away down there, I guess it's verse 29. No other God can save in this way. Praise be to the God of these young men, because no other God can save the way this God saves.

Now again, Nebuchadnezzar had no real idea of the glory of the words that he spoke. But we know tonight in the light of Bethlehem and the light of Gethsemane and Calvary and the empty tomb, we know what to say. We know what to mean that no God can save the way this God saves.

[29 : 59] He meant no God could have done what the God of these men did, taking them out of that intense fiery furnace. It was indeed a great wonder. But he said something more.

No other God can save the way. No other God can save the way. No other God may may may may
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that angels see the glory of God in the face of his sinful human children.

God's God's don't go into furnaces. Ah, but this God did. He was tested in all points just as we are. [31:58] Shared our infirmities. Shared our pains our woes, our illnesses. Shared our temptations. Shared our funeral death. Shared with me.

No other God. No other gods than that. He gave himself. He loved me. He gave himself for me. And I want justice this morning who are looking and listening, listening to the sound of great music as as the church glorified in the millions of angels and the whole of creation in Revelation 5 sound and the new song.

I want us to be jubilant. I want us to celebrate. I want melody. I want melody in the heart and I want such melody as the world can hear in the warnings of the righteous.

Is that what we are tonight? A community of praise, a community of celebration and of jubilation, part of this enormous choir, this multitude which no man can number, blood-bought sinners from every language and kindred and nation and tongue and all say, praise be to God because no other God can save in this way.

it's a song of joyous grief, it's a song of grievous joy and it is so beautiful and he said, Lord, let that voice be mine and I tonight in God's name I want more voices for the choir, I want enrollments, I want those able to sing from the depths of their own experience no other God is able to say in this way I want you indeed to hear the others sing I want you to hear those millions of angel voices which are so integral a part of the universe in which we live had we but ears to hear as heaven celebrates the victory and the supremacy of Jesus

[37:57] Lord we pray go with us as the fourth man whenever we are three as the second whenever we are alone as the third whenever we are two never leave us never forsake us and give us grace Lord that our own poor lisping stammering tongues may make their own contribution to this melody of joy and help no other God can save in this way forgive us all that thou dost find offense within us for our Saviour sake Amen our closing praise psalm 124 the second version which was in the whole psalm on the tune is the old 124 now

Israel may say and that truly psalm 124 in the second version now did the heavenly say on the sea in the heart of the blood that no tongue contend may may may Yet certainly they might be by the storm, and so nothing far not he could be.

God was the age that was he on the sea, and as his love he forever was his love.

Oh, I may want our soul to death by time.

The raging streams, when their bounds fell in waves, at them I saw open and in the deep.

[41 : 26] But bless me God, who doth a sickly king, and I'll forgive us for our living pain.

And to let me have a deep. Keep that heart out of the fire's snare.

He escapes away, so is our souls that we.

Throw hard their beds, and while she's still perie. Then all of our health is still the Lord's great day.

To cleanse us by his great heart is free.

[42 : 52] May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon each one of us, now and everlastingly.

Amen.