

## Where is God in Your Crisis? A Study of Daniel 3

Characteristic of Completeness: Faith

Big Idea: He meets you in the furnace.

Related Scriptures: Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Job 13:15; Isaiah 12:2; 43:2; 48:10; Matthew 10:28; Acts 5:28; 20:24; Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 11:34; 13:5; 1 Peter 4:12-14

Introduction:

- A. Elie ► Wiesel is a survivor of the Holocaust. In his book titled, *Night*, Wiesel recounts his horrific experiences in Nazi concentration camps. He tells of the time when he was forced to witness the Nazi hanging of three Jewish prisoners, one of whom was just a child. He ► says,

*The SS seemed more preoccupied, more worried, than usual. ► To hang a child in front of thousands of onlookers was not a small matter. ► The head of the camp read the verdict. ► All eyes were on the child. ► He was pale, almost calm, but he was biting his lips as he stood in the shadow of the gallows. . . .*

► *The three condemned prisoners together stepped onto the chairs. ► In unison, the nooses were placed around their necks. . . .*

► *“Where is [our] merciful God, where is He?” someone behind me was asking.*

► *At the signal, the three chairs were tipped over.*

► *Total silence in the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting. . . .*

► *Then came the march past the victims. ► The two men were no longer alive. . . . ► But the third rope was still moving; the child, too light, was still breathing. . . .*

► *And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. ► And we were forced to look at him at close range. . . .*

► *Behind me, I heard the same man asking:*

*“For God’s sake, where is God?”<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Marion Wiesel, trans., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972, 1985, 2006), 64-65.

- B. That's the question I'd like to consider today: Where is God? Where is God when awful things happen?

I don't want this to be a purely philosophical inquiry. I want it to be deeply personal. So the question becomes, ► where is God in your crisis?

Where is God when the pathology report says cancer? Where is God when you lose your job? Where is God when your life partner dies? Where is God when the money runs out? Where is God when your marriage seems lifeless? Where is God when you feel profoundly lonely?

Where is God in your crisis? That is the question.

- C. The book of Daniel, Chapter 3 gives us an answer. In Daniel 3, we see a crisis building.

1. You may recall from our study of Chapter 2 last week that God had enabled young Daniel, a godly Jewish captive, to interpret the dream of the pagan Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. This seemed to engender respect as indicated in ► Daniel 2:47, where the king said to Daniel,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 2:47** . . . “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.”

But apparently, the king's respect for the one true God was rather superficial or it didn't last long, because Chapter 3 opens in ► Verse 1 with these words:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:1** Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which *was* sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

- a. There is no evidence to suggest that statues of an ancient Babylonian ruler were ever worshipped as gods during the ruler's lifetime.<sup>2</sup> As such, the ► “image” was probably not an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Perhaps it was an image of some Babylonian god, but we don't know which one. Some suggest Nabu.<sup>3</sup> Others say Bel or Marduk.<sup>4</sup> Still others say that the image was a symbol of the world-power established by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar

<sup>2</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Daniel,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Archer, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel, The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, ed., vol. 18, (Memphis, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 112; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 81.

<sup>5</sup> Keil, *Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 9, three volumes in one, translated by M.G. Easton, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, reprinted 1975), 120.

was inspired to build this image by the dream he had back in Chapter 2.<sup>6</sup> You may recall that ► the head of the image in his dream was gold and represented the Babylonian kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar was ruler.

- b. ► Sixty cubits by six cubits is 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.<sup>7</sup> Ninety feet is roughly the size of a nine-story building.<sup>8</sup> So this was a tall, skinny thing—something like a totem pole.
  - c. Given its large size, it was probably not ► solid gold, but overlaid with gold.<sup>9</sup>
  - d. The location of the ► “plain of Dura” is not certain, but there is some evidence to indicate that it was up to sixteen miles south of Babylon.<sup>10</sup> There, archaeologists have discovered what is believed to be the base of a very large statue amidst some ruins which bear the name, “Dura.”<sup>11</sup> Some believe that these are the remains of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, but we can’t be certain.
2. Also, you may recall from Chapter 2 that the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was eventually shattered, in part, because of a lack of unity.<sup>12</sup> So, in an apparent effort to bring unity, the king assembled rulers from all over Babylonia for a leadership summit.<sup>13</sup> Verses ► 2 and 3 tell us,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:2** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent *word* to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ►<sup>3</sup> Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

<sup>6</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1337; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: Determining to Go God’s Direction*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2000), 38; Walvoord, 81.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Borland, Daniel, *Liberty Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, Jerry Falwell, ed., (Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 1635; Miller, 109; Pentecost, 1337; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1973), 80.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, 110.

<sup>9</sup> Archer, 50; Borland, 1635; Keil, 118; Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel, Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., vol. 20, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press and Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002) 88; Miller, 109; Wiersbe, 38; Walvoord, 80; Wood, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, 111; Walvoord, 81; Wood, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Keil, 119; Miller 110; Pentecost, 1337; Wood, 80.

<sup>12</sup> See Daniel 2:41-43.

<sup>13</sup> Lucas, 93.

If this were a paper done for an English composition class, Verses 2 and 3 might get marked down for redundancy. But the author wants us to know that this was a very large leadership summit with all kinds of leaders. This will turn out to be significant later on.

3. In Verses ► 4 through 6, we discover the king's strategy to unify his kingdom. He wanted everybody to be on the same page in terms of worshipping this image. He even brought in his own musical worship team for the affair. It says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:4** Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language, ►  
<sup>5</sup> that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. ► <sup>6</sup> But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

The furnace had probably been built to fire the bricks and smelt the metal used to make the image.<sup>14</sup> There was probably an opening at the top to put things in, and a door at the bottom to take things out.<sup>15</sup>

4. Verse ► 7 continues,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:7** Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

5. But three of the Jews took a stand. Apparently, there were so many people gathered for this leadership summit that Nebuchadnezzar didn't see the Jews who refused to fall down and worship the statue. But some of the leaders known as Chaldeans saw them and reported the disobedience to the king. The defiant ones were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—young men whom Nebuchadnezzar had earlier appointed to positions of significant influence in Babylon at Daniel's request.<sup>16</sup> The way that these Chaldeans tattled to the king suggests that they didn't like these three powerful Jews and wanted to see them burn. Beginning in ► Verse 8, it says,

---

<sup>14</sup> Miller, 115.

<sup>15</sup> Wiersbe, 44; Walvoord, 85; Wood, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel 2:49. By the way, it is interesting that some ancient Babylonian documents have been discovered listing names believed to identify Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego as government officials (Miller, 108).

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:8** For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. ►<sup>9</sup> They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: “O king, live forever! ►<sup>10</sup> You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. ►<sup>11</sup> But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ►<sup>12</sup> There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

6. By this point, you may be asking, where was Daniel? Good question. We don't know.

a. If he was there, some have suggested that perhaps he didn't bow down either, but the Chaldeans didn't dare tattle on him because he was too powerful.<sup>17</sup> Or perhaps he held a position so high that he was somehow exempted from the command.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine Daniel being present and not being an advocate for his friends.

b. More likely Daniel was not present because he may have been tending to government business elsewhere; for example, he may have been overseeing the capital of Babylon while Nebuchadnezzar was away.<sup>19</sup>

7. In any case, the king was very angry at the news of these defiant Jews. Verse ► 13 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:13** Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.

8. In the time it took to bring the defiant Jews to Nebuchadnezzar, the king seemed to have simmered down. Perhaps he realized that these guys were among his best leaders. So he asked for an explanation and then gave them another chance to obey his command. Picking it up in ► Verse 14:

<sup>17</sup> Archer, 55; Keil, 117; Pentecost, 1339.

<sup>18</sup> Archer, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Archer, 55; Borland, 1638; Gene A. Getz, *Daniel: Standing Firm for God, Men of Character Series*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 65; Keil, 117; Miller, 108; Pentecost, 1339; Walvoord, 85; Wood, 78; Some have also suggested that Daniel may have been ill (Archer, 55; Wood, 78).

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:14** Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ►<sup>15</sup> “Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. ► But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

9. The question posed by the king—► “what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”—sets up Verses 16-18, which constitute the center or focal point of the Chapter.<sup>20</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego responded with a confession of faith in the one true God of the Bible. In fact, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is faith—particularly faith in crisis situations. Verses ► 16-18 describe their remarkable confession of faith:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:16** Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ►<sup>17</sup> If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ►<sup>18</sup> But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Notice that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego took a stand with grounded, gracious grit.

- a. Their stand was grounded in the first two of the Ten Commandments, as recorded in Exodus 20:3-5:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Exodus 20:3** “You shall have no other gods before Me.<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the

<sup>20</sup> The structure of Chapter 3 is chiasmatic and indicates that Verses 16-18 constitute the focal point (Lucas, 86):

- Nebuchadnezzar’s decree to honor the image (1-7)
- Jews accused (8-12)
- Jews threatened (13-15)
- Jews confess faith (16-18)
- Jews punished (19-23)
- Jews vindicated (24-27)
- Nebuchadnezzar’s decree to honor God (28-30)

water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . .”

- b. Their stand was also gracious. They didn't spit in Nebuchadnezzar's face. When they said, ► “We do not need to give you an answer,” it was not an arrogant remark. They were simply admitting their guilt.<sup>21</sup> They had no need to defend themselves because they had no defense; they did not bow down. There was no need for them to make excuses like, “We've got bad knees,” or “We didn't understand the decree,” or “We just don't like those worship songs.”
  - c. And their stand showed grit. Their faith was not that God would necessarily deliver them, though they knew that God was able. They were simply resolved to obey God, even if it cost them their lives. One scholar observes, “The young men recognized that God's will might be different from what they would find pleasant, and they were willing to have it so, without complaining.”<sup>22</sup>
10. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make doubly sure that the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego could not deliver them from incineration. Verses ► 19-21 describe the measures he took:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:19** Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. ► He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ► <sup>20</sup> He commanded certain valiant warriors who *were* in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast *them* into the furnace of blazing fire. ► <sup>21</sup> Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their *other* clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.

Heating the furnace “seven times more than it was usually heated,” using “valiant warriors” to take them, having the men “tied up,” and keeping their outer garments on as kindling all seem to be measures Nebuchadnezzar took to make sure that their God could not save them.

11. Now this was a crisis! Put yourself in the sandals of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. What would you be thinking? How would you feel? I can only imagine the trauma. It probably took a little while to superheat the furnace. Perhaps they could feel the heat radiating, and they wondered how long it would take to suffer and die. Imagine it.

---

<sup>21</sup> Wood, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, 89.

*Nebuchadnezzar read the verdict. All eyes were on the three. They were pale, almost calm, but they were biting their lips as they stood in the shadow of the furnace.*

*The three condemned prisoners together stepped onto the furnace. In unison, the ropes were placed around them.*

*Where is our merciful God, where is He?*

*At the signal, the three Jews were thrown in.*

*Total silence in the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting . . .*

*For God's sake, where is God?*

Verses ► 22-23 say,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:22** For this reason, because the king's command *was* urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. ► <sup>23</sup> But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up.

12. Where is God? Where is God when your child is not walking with the Lord? Where is God in your chronic illness? Where is God when the pain of some past abuse won't go away? Where is God when you're weighed down with drudgery and exhaustion? Where is God in your depression?

I. Where was God in the midst of the crisis of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego? Where was God? Listen to Verses ► 24 and 25:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:24** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." ► <sup>25</sup> He said, "Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!"

A. Nebuchadnezzar had the three Jews thrown into the furnace, and now he saw four men untied and walking around in the midst of the fire, unharmed. Who was the fourth man? The fourth man was either an angel or the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup> I think it was Jesus. Many scholars think so, too.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Borland, 1637; Miller, 123; Walvoord, 93; Wood 94.

<sup>24</sup> Getz, 67; Miller, 123-124; Pentecost, 1340; Wiersbe, 44; Wood, 94; though Lucas, 92, says few modern commentators hold to this.

This brings us to the answer to our question. Where was God? God was in the furnace. He met them in the furnace. You see, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were not saved *from* the furnace; they were sustained *in* the furnace.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes God doesn't deliver you *from* the furnace; He meets you *in* the furnace. And that's ► the big idea of my message: He meets you in the furnace.<sup>26</sup>

- B. Where is God in your fiery crisis? He meets you in the furnace. God never promised your deliverance from fiery trials in this life; but He has promised His sustaining presence with you in the midst of them.

What difference does this make? It makes a world of difference in our approach to life. It suggests that, in many cases, the furnace is not the place from which we should run; it is the place where God wants to meet us. If the sovereign God has an appointment with us in the furnace, then the furnace is the best place to be.

This may sound silly, but as I studied this, I imagined God calling me on the phone and saying, "Hey Bob, I'd like to get together with you. I want to tell you what's on My mind. I miss you. We have some catching up to do. I want you to experience My love and My strength and My grace more deeply than you ever have before."

And I say, "Sounds great. Where do you want to meet?"

And He says, "I'll meet you in the furnace."

And I say, "Lord, I don't really like that place. I don't see why the furnace is necessary. Why can't there be an easier way? I don't understand the need for the fiery furnace."

- II. But that's just it. Sometimes God meets you in the furnace to accomplish purposes that are impossible for us to see in the midst of the fire. It requires faith.

- A. Sometimes God uses furnaces to ► refine us. To bring to the surface impurities in our character that need to be skimmed off. To burn away unworthy dreams and ambitions that distract us from our highest calling. To forge our faith. To mold us.

In the book of Genesis, you may recall that the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt for hundreds of years. Elsewhere in the Bible, this Egyptian captivity is described as an "iron furnace."<sup>27</sup>

And in Isaiah ► 48:10 notice how the Lord describes the Babylonian exile which serves as the backdrop for our text. The Lord addresses the Israelites, saying,

---

<sup>25</sup> Lucas, 95.

<sup>26</sup> I borrowed and adapted this language from John Ortberg, "Fourth Man in the Furnace," *Preaching Today* Tape #216.

<sup>27</sup> Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jeremiah 11:4.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Isaiah 48:10** “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

But God had promised to be with them in the furnace. In Isaiah ► 43:2, He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Isaiah 43:2** “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.”

God assures His strengthening presence in times of trial, not miraculous deliverance from trials.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes God uses furnaces to refine us.

Do you think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had any idea how God was using this furnace to refine them as they approached the furnace and were thrown in? I don’t think so.

But *after* the furnace, as they had some time to reflect, do you think this furnace experience transformed their lives? Do you think their faith was strengthened in the furnace? Do you think the furnace actually became one of their most precious memories? A thousand times yes. Sometimes God uses furnaces to refine us.

- B. And ► sometimes God brings honor to Himself in the midst of the furnace. God is often glorified through the fire.

Remember Nebuchadnezzar’s rhetorical question back in ► Verse 15?

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:15** . . . what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

God had orchestrated this meeting in the furnace to provide a resounding answer—an answer that would be given not just for Nebuchadnezzar, but for all the leaders of Babylon to see and to smell. Remember who was there: “the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled.”<sup>29</sup> Picking up in ► Verse 26:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” . . .

At that point, I would have been tempted to say, “No, you come in *here*.” But they didn’t.

► <sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:26** . . . Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. ► <sup>27</sup> The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the

<sup>28</sup> Lucas, 96.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel 3:3.

king's high officials gathered around ► *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them.

In retrospect, we can see how this furnace experience played out to the glory of Almighty God. But I don't think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego could even imagine it as they approached the furnace and were thrown in. Sometimes God brings honor to Himself in the midst of the furnace.

- C. And ► sometimes the furnace is the way God protects us. Sometimes the furnace that seems so dangerous to us is the thing God uses to keep us safe. Or the furnace can even be the way ► God liberates us. Sometimes being bound in the furnace is the very thing that God uses to set us free.

God used the furnace on the plain of Dura to protect His people, and to give them the freedom to worship Him. Listen, beginning in ► Verse 28:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Daniel 3:28** Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, ► who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ► <sup>29</sup> Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego ► shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." ► <sup>30</sup> Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Remember, the Chaldeans seemed to hate the Jews and wanted to see them burn. God used the malicious tattling of the Chaldeans to bring about an edict that would actually protect the Jews from the Chaldeans, and allow the Jews to worship freely. This would have been unimaginable to the young men in the midst of the furnace. But ► God uses the furnace in ways that are beyond our comprehension in the midst of the fire.

When I graduated from college in 1979, I thought about going to seminary to become a pastor. But I didn't. God wanted to meet me in the furnace. For seventeen years God needed to refine me. For nearly 15 of those years, in the furnace of the business world, He burned out of me much of the selfish ambition that drove me. Through the furnace of multiple brain surgeries for my daughter, He burned out of me much of my stubborn self-reliance and He turned my heart toward home. Through painful personal betrayal, He burned away much of my desire to please people instead of God. Through the transition from fat cat to flat broke, He burned away some pride that needed to go. And in all this, He was protecting me and protecting His people from a

guy who was not ready to be a pastor in 1979. Could I see that then, in the midst of the furnace? Not at all.

And He's not done. There will be more furnaces. More flames. More burning. He's got work to do in and through all of us.

And so, we are called to live by faith. When the sovereign God has an appointment with you in the furnace, then the furnace is the best place to be. So when the flames of the furnace seem to be consuming you, when your heart is breaking and crying out, "Where is God?" remember: He meets you in the furnace.