**The Fourth Man**

Daniel 3

This is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, rightly recounted in Sunday Schools everywhere. ***Raq, Shaq and Benny and the fiery furnace.*** It’s a story of courageous faith in the face of certain death. And also large chocolate bunnies. (That’s a Veggie Tales reference for those of you under 40.) It reminds us of persecuted Christians all over the world right now who face decisions like this every single day.

We gave out ***prayer booklets from Open Doors*** a few weeks ago that highlight the 50 countries with the worst persecution. N Korea has been the worst place to be a Christian for a long time now. But Nigeria is the place where the most Christians are killed for their faith.

Pastor Zachariah, on the cover of the booklets, lost his wife when Fulani militants attacked his village. And yet he can say:

“I am asking God to forgive our attackers, and for them to enter the Kingdom of God and not to die in their sins.” Pastor Zachariah, Nigeria (Open Doors Booklet)

***Saleh started a house church network in Yemen.*** He says, “Extremists make our ministry easier. Because of them, people reject and are horrified by what is being done in the name of religion. They start searching for the truth and we are there to tell them about it. We are there to show them God’s love and mercy.” Saleh has been arrested, beaten, and threatened with death for following Jesus. His name is on extremists’ “wanted” lists in Yemen. Saleh knows the cost. “We knew this would happen to us once we chose to follow Jesus.” Yet he refuses to give up.

“If we sit at home and do nothing, we would be safe. But what kind of Christians would we be if we weren’t risking our lives for others to know life?” Saleh, Yemen (Open Doors Booklet)

What we learn from persecuted Christians is the same thing we learn from Shadraq, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3 - **Jesus saves**. As we trust in Him, He is with us in our suffering and He brings us through it by His grace. We are not guaranteed to be physically saved from every illness or challenge, but we can be sure that Jesus has saved us from our greatest enemies: sin and death.

So let’s look at how Jesus saved these three young Jewish men and be encouraged that He saves us in the same way as we trust in Him. First:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By Faith **Alone**

“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.” Daniel 3:17

This is the big moment for the three young men. ***They were torn from their homes***, forced to a new land with unfamiliar customs and religion. Daniel chapter one showed their resilience and faith to stand firm in the face of strange dietary customs. Instead of eating food that was contaminated by Babylonian idolatry they joined Daniel in eating only vegetables and God miraculously enabled them to remain healthy.

Then in Daniel 2 ***King Nebachudnezzar had a dream*** that no one could interpret until Daniel and his friends prayed. Then God enabled Daniel to both know the king’s dream and tell him what it meant. In a bout of unbelievable irony Nebuchadnezzar turned right around from his dream of a huge golden statue that God destroyed with a small stone and what did the king do? **He built a giant golden statue… of HIMSELF**.

“Neb, what was the point of that dream Daniel interpreted? ***The kingdoms of men - including yours - will rise and fall***, only God’s kingdom will last forever. Remember that? The statue was gold, then silver, then bronze, then iron and clay and then – what was that last condition of the statue? Oh yeah, DUST. Dust in the wind, as it were. But your response to this dream was to build a statue… of yourself?”

Yeah. **Old King Neb still had some lessons to learn**, as we will see next week. He needed an extended time out, like way out in the fields. It is truly remarkable how patient God was with this stubborn, arrogant Babylonian king. A miracle in chapter one. A dream in chapter two. This encounter in chapter three. Then a prophetic warning with another dream and an extended time out.

***Can anyone relate?*** God speaks to you, does miracles for you, sends prophets and reminders, disciplines you in different ways… Oh, we are so much like the king here. We read this story and we all want to be Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but often we are more like Nebuchadnezzar… Some people have to learn the hard way. That’s me for sure. Most of you are more like the young Jews, thankfully.

And here they are, before the crazy, narcissistic, slow to learn king who is demanding that they fall down and worship his statue. It wasn’t really about the statue and certainly not about the Babylonian gods – it was about the king himself. Here were three Jews defying his order, defying HIM. To say the least, ***the king was upset.***

He gave them **one more chance** – maybe you didn’t get the memo – the Empire-wide memo delivered with history’s biggest orchestra. So now you can correct this little misunderstanding by just getting on your knees and joining the crowd here by worshiping my golden statue. Oh, and if you don’t, there’s this furnace over here you should be aware of.

Which brings us to this incredible moment with the three guys. “Our God is able to deliver us out of your hand, O king.” You’ve got to love that tag at the end, ***“O king.”*** They recognize his title. They stay respectful. But they won’t budge on the order.

Notice **the double layer of faith here**. Our God is ABLE to save us, and we believe He WILL save us. Every time you pray you exercise this same double layer of faith. God can. And I believe, as a God of love and grace, He will. So Lord, help me with my finances; help me with my aches and pains, help me with my family, help me with my work. I know you can. I believe you will. Again and again and again.

***This is how Jesus saves.*** Not just to forgive your sins and get you to heaven, but every moment of every day, every problem. He saves us by faith alone. He asks us to clearly and simply **TRUST in HIM**. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” Don’t divide your trust. Don’t hedge your bets. Anything or anyone else you are tempted to trust in is a **BAD BET**.

That’s what the kids say these days, not realizing they are referencing blackjack or poker. You say, “Wanna get Chick-fil-A?” And they respond: ***“Bet.”*** As opposed to Check or fold, I guess. “You like that girl?” “Bet.” I didn’t understand the reference at first and thought they were doing shorthand for “You betcha.” But no. It’s a straight up gambling reference. It’s a way to say yes. Cool. Rad.

So let’s apply the shorthand. Should we trust completely in Jesus?

* BET.
* It’s a good reference. Put all your money there. Go all in.
* On Jesus. Bet on HIM. Don’t hold anything back.

That’s what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did. They said, “Our God is able and we believe he will deliver us.” Then they went on to ***prove they were all in***.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By Faith **Alone**
	* That chooses God and **His kingdom** over this world

“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.” Daniel 3:18

But if not. What a statement of faith. ***What resolve!*** Our God is able and we believe He WILL deliver us. BUT IF NOT, we still won’t budge. This is Job level commitment, “Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him” (Job 13:15). In this case it is “Though YOU slay us, we will hope in the Lord.”

This is what **real faith** looks like: professed trust in the Lord coupled with a renunciation of the gods of this world. Repentance and faith are always linked in true saving faith. Before you can take hold of Jesus as your Savior ***you have to let go of this world***, you have to turn from your sins. It is only when you “take up your cross” that you can follow after Jesus. It is only after you die to yourself that you can begin to live for Jesus.

This is what the three Jews are modeling for us: ***a complete willingness to let go of this world.*** Their faith in God’s power was strong, but they could feel the heat from the furnace and they knew King Neb pretty well. Their odds were not good. Still, they said BET when a lot of us would have said FOLD. I’m out.

**This is how Jesus saves**. This is true when you first put your faith in Jesus and he saved you from sin and death forever. You have to repent and let go of your self, your sin and this world and turn to Jesus in faith, professing your trust in Him alone for salvation.

And this is ***how Jesus saves from day to day*** and moment to moment. Raq, Shaq and Benny were not getting saved here. They were just going through a regular day in Babylon. But in that moment their faith in the Lord and their allegiance to the God of Israel was TESTED. They stood the test, they passed it with flying colors.

***How are you doing as your faith is tested right now?*** Do you have that double layer of faith where you know God is able to help you, whatever you’re facing and that you believe He WILL intervene in your case? Are you standing firm in your resolution to trust and serve Christ alone, actively resisting the allures of this world? Is your commitment to the Lord rock solid even if He doesn’t address your particular problem or issue right now?

* Say it’s a ***health situation***. You can say like the Jewish men, “Our God whom we serve is able to heal me, and I believe He will heal me. BUT IF NOT, my faith will not waver nor will my commitment to love and praise Him.”
* Or if it’s a ***work situation***. “Our God whom we serve is able to change my boss’s heart or open up a new opportunity, and I believe because of His great love for me He will make that change. BUT IF NOT, I will still trust in the Lord and praise Him.”
* Or if it’s ***a relationship***. “Our God whom we serve is able to heal this relationship and restore love and reconcile us, and I believe He will do so soon. BUT IF NOT, I will keep loving the person, praying for them and thanking God for His love for me.”

That **BUT IF NOT is so important**. Otherwise our prayers and trust are CONDITIONAL. Otherwise we are TESTING God, and that is really not recommended in the Bible. “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” He’s the professor and we are the students. He gives us tests, we don’t turn around and give Him tests.

So that is the first way Jesus saves: through faith alone and commitment to Jesus above everything and everyone in this world. Second.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire

 “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury… He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.” Daniel 3:19

King Nebuchadnezzar was not great at managing his emotions. If he ever drove a chariot he almost certainly had road rage. ***He “was filled with fury.”*** The expression on his face changed. He ordered the young men bound, which was really overkill because who needs ropes to bind someone who is about to be incinerated. But still, he was being thorough. So he called on some of his strongest warriors to grab these three pencil pushers and cast them into the over-heated fiery furnace.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire

 “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.” Daniel 3:22

Get the picture here. ***Strong, muscly soldiers*** pick up these young Jewish men who are tied up in cords and march them to the furnace to throw them in. But in the process, the soldiers are killed by the heat and flames of the furnace.

I respect these soldiers. ***I’ve been near a bonfire*** on a few occasions and the bigger the fire the harder it is to be close to it. With a furnace the opening would be especially concentrated in terms of heat, so to throw in the Jewish men the soldiers had to get pretty close and, it turns out, they got too close and they died.

But no sooner had the Jews been thrown in and the soldiers died than the king stood up and shouted:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire

“Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? … But I see four men unbound, walking… and they are not hurt…” Daniel 3:25

Suddenly the cords binding Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were gone and they were just walking around in the fire, with a fourth man.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire

“But I see four men unbound, walking… and they are not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” Daniel 3:25

Now, there were ***any number of ways God could have saved the three men*** from the fire: ***teleportation***, he could have beamed them up somewhere; ***separation***, he could have made a bubble in the fire where it wasn’t hot, like with the Exodus when the water went left and right; ***destruction***, he could have blown up the furnace itself; ***revolution***, he could have prompted some kind of coup to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar just then.

But notice HOW God chose to save them: **INCARNATION**. He chose to stand WITH THEM in the fire. Now, we can’t know for sure that this was the preincarnate Jesus. It could have been an angel. But in this part of Daniel king Nebuchadnezzar is serving as a surprising and ironic PROPHET, speaking many words of truth for the Lord. So I expect his assessment was right – this was not just A son of the gods, but THE Son of God.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire
	* Enduring the punishment we **Deserve**

“But I see four men unbound, walking… and they are not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” Daniel 3:25

The salvation analogy only goes as far as the incarnation here in Daniel 3, ***we don’t get to SUBSTITUTION here*** because Jesus didn’t yet have his human body, so he couldn’t die in place of the Jews. Nor were they in the furnace due to their own sins, so it wouldn’t have been an appropriate sacrifice.

But the analogy works perfectly for **what Jesus did on the cross**. He not only came to earth to be with us and share our experiences, he went to the cross to endure the punishment you and I should have suffered for eternity.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not deserve to be thrown into that fiery furnace, ***but you and I DO DESERVE to be thrown into the lake of fire*** which is the second death. “The wages of sin is death,” and every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, bringing the just penalty of death upon us. Listen to 2 Cor. 5.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire
	* Enduring the punishment we **Deserve**

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Cor. 5:21

Jesus BECAME sin for us. ***He took our sin INTO HIMSELF on the cross.*** That is what died that day as the Romans pounded in the nails and Jesus’ human body suffocated. With each agonizing breath Jesus had to push against the nail in his feet and feel the rough wood scrape across his shredded back. Darkness covered the earth as the just wrath of God fell on Jesus. The ground trembled. Rocks broke apart. The world itself groaned as the eternal relationship of God the Father and God the Son was torn in two.

In those hours from noon until 3 pm **Jesus was enduring the punishment you deserved** and I deserved. He drank the cup of the wine of God’s fury mentioned in Isaiah 51 and described in chapter 53:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By being **With us** in the fire
	* Enduring the punishment we **Deserve**

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

Isaiah 53:5

We sinned; he suffered. ***We broke God’s law; he fulfilled God’s just requirements.*** We deserved judgment and condemnation, Jesus gave us life and peace.

Each one of should have a date with a blazing fiery furnace called justice. But Jesus went there - ***he stepped into that fire so you and I would never experience it.*** He not only came to be with us in the furnace of life in this world, he protected us from the furnace of eternal suffering in hell.

***This is how Jesus saves us.*** It’s how you got saved to begin with, when you first trusted in Jesus’ sacrifice for you. But it’s also how Jesus saves us every single day. He is WITH US in every trial, in every challenge, just as he was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They may have felt alone as the king threatened them with death. But when they stood firm, when they professed their faith and commitment and accepted the consequences, they saw the fourth man with them in the fire. They walked around with King Jesus. And he wasn’t just with them in the fire. He got them out of it. King Nebuchadnezzar shouted:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him

“Servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Daniel 3:26

Did you notice that the king didn’t send soldiers to get them out? He certainly didn’t walk over and try to get them out himself. He just called for them. He figured, if they could walk around in there unhurt, they could just hop out on their own. And they did.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him

“Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out from the fire.” Daniel 3:26

But that’s not the remarkable part. Look at the details that follow.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him

“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…” Daniel 3:27

Because of the fourth man with them, the shiny son of the gods, the power had not affected them at all. Not a hair on their heads was singed. Not a fiber of their cloaks was burned.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him

“The fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men… And no smell of fire had come upon them.” Daniel 3:27

***They didn’t even smell like smoke.*** Now, anyone who has gone camping knows that is nothing short of a miracle. The smell of smoke is on you for days. It gets into everything.

One Christmas I really wanted ***a Rock Band set*** and found a good deal on craigs list. We picked it up from this dingy little home, and I should have known better as soon as I walked in, because the smell of smoke was everywhere in that place. But I was determined to get this Rock Band kit for my young boys, so I went ahead and bought it.

But as soon as we got home and brought it inside I knew it was a mistake. That drumset, which was mostly plastic, was infused with the smell of cigarette smoke. I cleaned it with everything we had in the house and left it in the garage for a few days. But nothing could make that smell go away.

Thankfully I was able to sell it for the same price and find another one that I was careful to check had not been owned by a smoker. And THAT Rock Band set we still have today!

But that showed us ***the invasive power of the smell of smoke.***

Yet somehow, for Raq, Shack and Benny, the smoke had not come upon them at all. They were totally untouched by the fire. Here is how Nebuchadnezzar interpreted the event:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him.” Daniel 3:28

The king knew it was no accident; **this was a miracle** of divine intervention. The Jewish men had professed their faith in the God of Israel, and their God had saved them, had even shown up with them in the fire. The king added that no one in the whole kingdom of Babylon was allowed to speak a word against their God:

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By **Raising us** to new life in Him
	* Giving us **Spiritual** life now and **Physical** resurrection when He comes back

“For there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” Daniel 3:29

So this is how Jesus saves: by giving us spiritual life NOW, at the moment of personal faith, and by promising physical resurrection and full restoration of all things when he comes back.

In the meantime, we trust Him and call on Him to help us with everything. We know he is ABLE and we often discern that He is WILLING to intervene on our behalf. ***Sometimes he calms the storm.*** Sometimes he keeps us from it. And sometimes he simply lets us know that He is with us in the midst of all the fire and fear, the chaos and upheaval.

Truly there is **no other God** who is able to rescue in this way.

The challenge for those of us facing various fiery furnaces today is that ***we can’t know for sure what God will actually do in any given situation.*** We can say with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that our God is ABLE and we can ASK God to see if He is willing. But we can’t guarantee that God is willing to heal a certain disease or intervene in a work situation or help us reconcile a relationship.

***What is your fiery furnace right now?*** What is the threat in front of you? What is the danger or fear you are facing?

What you can ALWAYS count on is **God’s SPIRITUAL intervention**. This is the decisive victory Jesus won for us on the cross. He didn’t come to overthrow Rome and set up Jerusalem as the capitol for His kingdom on earth. He came to die for sin and set us free from its penalty and power. But not yet the presence of sin everywhere.

The enemies Jesus defeated were sin and death, guilt and shame. Not every evil empire, every wicked leader, every terrible institution. ***He came to change INDIVIDUALS*** on the inside, and use US to bring gradual change to this dark and broken world.

It is always appropriate to **PRAY FOR physical healing** and direct, immediate intervention. We are God’s children and He delights to hear our prayers, to help us face our fears, even if He is not going to change our situations right now. But the key to Christian prayer is that we ASK God our Father for help, we don’t TELL HIM to help, we don’t DIRECT HIM. We TRUST HIM.

“Our God is ABLE to deliver us from your hand, O king, but if not – we will not bow down to the image you have built or worship any other gods.”

***The BUT IF NOT is the key.*** We will hold on to our faith in the Lord Jesus and our commitment to Him NO MATTER WHAT. Because He has saved us spiritually and He WILL save us physically, just not right away.

So here is our summary for today.

**How Jesus Saves:**

1. By Faith **Alone**
	* That chooses God and **His kingdom** over this world
2. By being **With us** in the fire
	* Enduring the punishment we **Deserve**
3. By **Raising us** to new life in Him
	* Giving us **Spiritual** life now and **Physical** resurrection when He comes back

***Jesus saves us as we trust in Him alone.*** We choose Him and His kingdom above all other things, other gods, other kingdoms, all other allegiances. Jesus is the only King.

***Jesus saves by being WITH US*** – He entered the world as a fully human baby and lived a life through which he was tempted in every way as we are. He came to be with us so he could endure the punishment you and I deserve. That’s what the cross was about.

***And Jesus saves by raising us to new life in him.*** He promises spiritual life now and every spiritual blessing as we are united with Him in faith. And He promises physical resurrection and total restoration when He comes back and makes all things new.

**So we trust in Jesus.** We trust Him no matter what. We know our God is ABLE to intervene in any problem, any hardship. We pray and ask Him to do just that. But EVEN IF HE DOESN’T heal or do a miracle or rescue us in the way we want we will not stop trusting Him and loving Him and praising Him and sharing His love with others.

There is no other god who saves in this way. No one but Jesus.

Let’s pray.