

“Purification” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 6 March 29, 2023

I. **Daniel 3 – previously read.**

II. **Sometimes our faith can get us into trouble.**

- a. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their faith led them into the fire.
- b. With steam coming out of his ears because they wouldn't bow down to his created image... King Nebuchadnezzar heated up his furnace 7 times hotter than normal and tossed them in... looking to incinerate these horrible people.
- c. However, in a story for the ages, they were unharmed.... Their clothes were just fine... not even a hint of smoke on them – as a bunch of servants were killed just putting these men in the furnace!
- d. Normally, fire does not save people in the Bible, like it says in Hebrews 12:29 - “Our God is a consuming fire.”
 - i. Fire is normally used in God's wrath to destroy people who are evil or disobedient.
 - ii. For example, when Nadab and Abihu offered incense to the Lord which He did not command, fire came out from the Lord and consumed them (Leviticus 10:1-2).
 - iii. Or when Korah the son of Izhar assembled 250 chiefs of the congregation to rebel against Moses, fire came out from the Lord and consumed them all (Numbers 16:35).
 - iv. Or when Sodom and Gomorrah went off the rails with evil, God rained down fire and brimstone to completely destroy them.
 - v. Even when God gave His Law on Mt. Sinai, there was fire on the mountain (Deuteronomy 5:22) that made the Israelites fearful... They said, “This great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, we shall die” (Deuteronomy 5:25).
- e. It's not very often in the Bible that something is on fire and is not consumed.
 - i. The burning bush in Exodus 3 is one example... Moses looked, and “behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed” (Ex 3:2).
 - 1. The Lord was in the fire.
 - ii. The three men in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3 is another example, as it says, “The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.” (vs 3:27)
 - 1. The only thing that the fire consumed was the ropes that bound them.
 - 2. This miraculous deliverance seems to have something to do with the presence of the Lord in the fire.... Because Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and saw a fourth man

in the furnace, who looked like “a son of the gods,” which could also be translated, “the Son of God”. (vs 3:25)

3. Some would say this was Jesus before being born as a man, and it does make sense, because He is the One who saves us from the consuming fire of God’s wrath.

III. **Faith leads us into the fire of repentance.**

- a. In Greek, the word for fire is “pur” – which is where we get our word, purify.
 - i. This fire called repentance is what purifies us and helps us to change our sinful ways.
- b. I want you to think about two different ways of looking at repentance.
 - i. First of all, repentance means that we are consumed by God’s wrath and need to be resurrected every single day.
 - ii. Secondly, repentance means that we are not hurt by God’s wrath, but instead, just the ropes that bind us are burned away.
- c. So being consumed by God’s wrath and then resurrected every day is something I constantly talk about in Baptism – not fire, but water.
 - i. The old Adam is drowned in the baptismal waters and the new Adam comes forth every day through contrition and repentance.
 - ii. However, fire can do the same thing... as we can use a similar analogy to Baptism...
 1. God’s law and our failure to live up to it reduces us to ashes, and the gospel raises us from those ashes.
 - a. Kind of like the Phoenix, the bird that burns to ashes and then rises again from those ashes.
 2. In a way, being consumed is like saying that we are totally consumed by sin – or that our entire selves are sick with sin – even the parts we think are good.
 - a. Michele and I often say that we love each other, “more than anything... except Jesus.”
 - b. We might think that loving a child or a spouse is the highest good – but what if it is higher than our love for God?
 - c. Anything can get in the way of loving God – but especially our selfish motives.
 - iii. The point is that we cannot get away from the sin that permeates us, but each day by contrition and repentance, we go into the fire to have it burned away – and God raises us up out of the ashes.
- d. The second way to think about repentance is the ropes that bind us are burned away, but we are not hurt by the fire of God’s wrath.
 - i. To use the example from my professor at Concordia Seminary, Dr. Maxwell, “God created us good and implanted in us the natural desires that we have. Sin is not a different set of desires that invades

us, but it is a twisting of those same desires that God gave us. It's as if sin has wound ropes around our healthy desires and dragged them off in a direction God did not mean for them to go."

- ii. I often say that we turn good things into bad – whether it's food, money, sex, or anything else that can be abused... but originally, God made them good.

- 1. In a similar way, we have natural parts of us that were created good that get distorted by sin – our emotions for example.

- a. Fear becomes more than a signal of real danger, but it begins to invade every part of us – or anger comes out in all the wrong places – hurting people around us.

- b. Again, emotions are not inherently wrong, just bound by sin... and that includes many other parts of our lives...

- c. So the fire of repentance burns away what's tying us down and allows us to operate more like God wants.

- e. These two ways of looking at repentance – dying and rising from the ashes and the ropes of sin being burned off us – help us to see how God works to free us.

IV. **God overcomes the bondage of sin.**

- a. I think it's important to remember that repentance comes when the Holy Spirit calls us into turning back to God.

- b. We have no desire or need to turn to God if He isn't pursuing and calling us to return to our only source of freedom.

- i. As we will participate in Holy Week soon, Jesus' Passion is looming.

- ii. The gift of Jesus, the one who took upon Himself the wrath of God in His torture and death on the cross, is why we come out of the fire unscathed.

- iii. We are released from the bondage of sin, and by daily contrition and repentance, our lives may better reflect who God intended us to be.

- c. As God has put this gift of "purification" in our lives, we can see repentance as a consuming fire that purifies us so that we can live our lives to the fullest... or so we can thrive like God intended from creation.

- d. I love the image of the ropes of bondage being burned off of us, but our bodies are not burned... not even the smell of smoke... it's just a release.

- e. I also love the image of being reduced to a pile of ashes – only to be raised again to new life – just like the resurrection.

- f. Either way, the fire will not harm us, only purify us.

- g. This is the gift of Jesus and His work – God does the work and we escape the ultimate consequence – by grace through faith we are saved! Amen.¹

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