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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**May 15, 2016**

**The Fiery Furnace, Continued...**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just, again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness and Lord, even though we are prone to wander, Lord, you are still the sovereign God who cares so deeply for us that you've sent us not only your Son but your word as well. And Lord, as we again open up your word, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, the one who makes this make sense. Guide us into your word, give us the ability to understand it, and again, to make it a permanent part of our lives, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we ended last week's message about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace noting that King Nebuchadnezzar after throwing the three into that furnace, well, he looks into the furnace and he finds that there are not three in there but four. I want to expand on that fourth member in the furnace this morning and what his presence there means to us.

This is *Daniel 3:16-30*. It says: *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need*

to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look," he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and

spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed, nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any God except their own God! Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Well, if you are looking for a happy ending, this is a good place to look. We spoke last week about the amazing courage that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had, this is a courage that could look a murderous Nebuchadnezzar right in the eye and claim that no matter what he did, they had no intention whatsoever of bowing down to this idol that he had erected. And I spoke last time about why

a commitment to God's glory will never let you down and I gave a very simple explanation for why that is. It's because God will never let you down. God revealed something very special within that fiery furnace and he revealed it to someone who was as yet still a pagan but who also happened to be the most powerful man in the entire world. God chose to use Nebuchadnezzar as his witness for the defense to those who think that God doesn't really care for his own. I mean God gave a spectacular example to Nebuchadnezzar of something that every single one of his children can be assured that when they are in the fiery furnace they, too, will receive as well, and that's God's presence. God said it in the form of a promise to the nation of Israel. He said this in *Isaiah 43:2*, he said: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

Now there's no doubt that that was spectacularly demonstrated in what happened in that fire that day. You know, many Bible scholars agree that fourth person, the one who will looked "like the Son of God" was actually that very person, that was the pre incarnate Christ, they say. Christ was visibly demonstrating in front of the most powerful man in the world and the entire nation of Babylon

that when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego literally walked through a fire, he was there in that fire with them. And what I want to say to you this morning is that if you are his child, you have God's assurance that when you go through the deepest of waters and when you are in a fiery furnace, God will be there in there with you. He's not going to take you around these trials, he's not going to take you over them, instead he insists he's going to take you through them.

I want to give you some examples of what I mean. When I say God promises us he will go with us when we are in the fire and the flood, and I want to point out something that I think we often miss when we see others going through that fire and flood. God gave us this visible demonstration of his presence with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and in essence what he did was he opened up the window of their struggle and we got to see God actively at work there. But the fact is God's promises apply to all of us in our struggles as much as it did to them. I made the case time and time again, you don't get boiling oil grace until you're thrown into boiling oil. But there's a second part to that truth, and that's this: It's usually only those who are thrown into the boiling oil receive boiling oil grace.

What I mean by that is this: You know, things happen, and every

one of us know that bad things happen. And usually they are experienced not just by the individual but by a whole community of friends and family and church and others, but God, for his reasons, pours out his grace not on the community per se, although he certainly can do that and he has done that at times, but he pours out his grace primarily on those who are at the center of the fire. Those who are on the outer edges don't get the grace that those who are at the center of the fire do. And often times those who are on the outskirts look on those who are undergoing the trial with eyes and ears that don't see and don't hear what the "victim" is experiencing. Now I've used the term rubberneckers before. I mean, we all know what happens when there's an accident. Folks who are driving by who were not at all involved in the accident, they can't help but being drawn into something bad that they see happen, so they tend to slow down, they crane their necks to see what can be seen, hence the term "rubberneckers." Well, God's grace is poured out on those who are going through a trial and it's usually not poured out on those of us who are not directly involved, that is, on those of us who are rubbernecking, as well intentioned as we may be.

Let me give you an example from scripture. You know, Stephen is known as the church's first martyr. This is a description of what took place at the end of his life. This is *Acts 6:8-11*, it

says this, it says: *And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen (as it was called) and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."*

Well, here's what's really taking place. They bring Stephen before the council and he delivers this blistering critique of the religious establishment. You have to understand, just a few chapters before in the book of Acts, Peter had done the very same thing. And in Peter's case, people's hearts were cut to the quick, and in one day 3,000 of them repented, were baptized, and joined the church. Well, Stephen is speaking the very same critique and he's speaking it filled with wisdom and truth, and the result this time instead is a murderous rage that causes the people to stone Stephen to death. Acts 7:54 says this, it says: *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud*

*voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

You have to understand, God had a master plan for the church here. See, God's plans through Peter was to grow the church. God's plans through Stephen was to spread the church and to spread it through persecution. So you could say, well, Peter gets blessed and Stephen gets executed. I mean, that's what it looks like to us rubberneckers who are on the outside. What's going on here? But God didn't just throw Stephen to the wolves. The fact is, Stephen did not die alone. There in the midst of his fiery furnace is the Holy Spirit, and he's opening up heaven itself, but he's opening it up to Stephen's eyes alone. Us rubberneckers don't get to see this. We get to hear the description of it. And so he gives him a vision of Christ who we all know is sitting at the right hand of the Father but now he gets a vision of Christ who is standing at the right hand of God welcoming Stephen as a hero into the eternal kingdom. Stephen, you see, got the grace of Christ's presence; we did not. As such, we were the rubberneckers. You see, that's a principle I think you need to remember when you see believers going through deep waters. Remember God's promise in *Psalm 46*, he says: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the*



*mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego along with Stephen all received in their times of trouble is what God promises to give us in our times of trouble, and it's his ultimate gift, it's his presence.*

Now some of you are new to the church won't know who I'm referring to, but a few years ago there was a woman who went through an extraordinary trial that we as a church had the privilege of praying for and learning from. You remember Christi. Believe it or not, this was six years ago that we -- I was preaching through Colossians and we talked at great length about Christi. She was a good friend of my sister's that she knew from her church in Scottsdale, Arizona who underwent a trial, and I'll let her describe the trial that she underwent. And as I said, she wrote this six years ago. It should be up there. I'll just read it. She says this to introduce her, she says: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit." Aristotle. She wrote:

"Dear Ones, February 19 is the anniversary date of my first surgery four years ago. When we moved to Scottsdale on December 26, 2006, I had a cough. Strange for me, but I felt fine. I also had some restricted breathing but chalked that up to not enough aerobic

exercise. On January 12, 2007 I was admitted to the hospital after spending an entire day in bed while my husband was at his new job. I was getting truly scared because I was there alone with the children, knew no one, and could not catch my breath. I spent the whole day literally focusing on getting enough air to simply take another shallow breath." Just -- she's moved here, she's brand new, she's a stranger, she doesn't know anybody, she's in her apartment by herself, and this is what she's describing. "When Doug got home, we all loaded up and went to Urgent Care. The dear doctor there examined me and said I had double pneumonia and arranged a room for me at the full Shea Hospital. I arrived on January 12th for what we assumed would be a two- or three-day stay. Six days later no one could understand how someone so healthy was not recovering from pneumonia. Dr. Conomos was my attending physician and allowed me to go home on day 6 -- with the understanding that I would return within a week for a bronchoscopy. When I did that, he found that my trachea was 75 plus percent blocked with a two-inch vertical mass of scar tissue. This blockage had caused the pneumonia, as my lungs were unable to clear. He said it was life threatening if mucous lodged there -- and sent me to Dr. Brian Trainor to consult for surgery to remove it. February 19, 2007, Dr. Trainor did my first surgery at Scottsdale Osborne Hospital. He removed half the tissue and inserted a trach tube." In other words she now had an open hole in

her neck. That's what she was breathing through. "I was devastated. Doug was devastated. The children were displaced, confused, and frightened. Two weeks later Dr. Trainor removed the other half of the scar tissue and we thought the surgeries were over. Four weeks after that, right before my 43rd birthday, doctor Conomos removed the trach tube. We thought the nightmare was over. Since that time, I have had 38 surgeries -- typically two to eight weeks apart, three T-tubes, two stents, 24 bronchoscopies or more, multiple periods of silence, one for seven months, 62 scoping procedures, four prolonged hospital stays, a collapsed lung, crepitis, a skin graft taken from my left inner cheek, consistent coughing, choking, and inability to swallow from a few days to some weeks, and an emergency room visit that I should not have lived through. And it's not over yet. Tomorrow Doug and I fly to Philadelphia for surgery number seven with Dr. Sataloff and his team; number 39 in toto. We arrived late Tuesday, February 15th. I have a scope in Dr. Sataloff's office on the 16th, and surgery on the 17th. We arrive at 6:00 a.m. as always, with surgery whenever they decide -- usually before noon. We will fly home that evening, God willing." She goes on to say: "Sounds awful, doesn't it? Where is God? What is he doing? It has been awful in a lot of ways. Suffering usually is. Prolonged suffering can really stink. Four years, a tracheostomy" -- that's a hole in your neck -- "for almost three and a half years. You really think God

loves you?"

Well, you know, it's one thing to have me stand up here and give you a theory as to how we are to trust God that he's going to be with us when we're in the fire and the flood, it's another thing entirely to have a living flesh and blood person demonstrate how she experienced that in real life. Christi educated us by demonstrating the difference between being the immediate recipient of God's grace and simply being an onlooker, a spiritual rubbernecker. In a sense with Christi we were all spiritual rubberneckerers. The very same Son of God who was in that fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was right alongside Christi in the midst of her fiery trial. But here's the difference between Christi and us. The fiery furnace didn't happen to us. It happened to her. We didn't get the grace that God promises to give to all of us when our trials come, but she did. Let me further jog our memories with this letter she wrote from the center, again, of her fiery furnace. She writes:

"Dear ones, these past ten days have been a new challenge altogether. Dr. Sataloff sewed back the flap that covers the trachea when eating or drinking in an attempt to keep the scar tissue back." Let me just explain. You know when you have food go down the wrong pipe? That's because there's a flap that covers

that pipe. Well, the doctor purposely opened it up and sewed it back in order to allow some healing to take place. So she had an open -- opening that she could not close directly into her lungs. "He said (and believed) the stitches would release in three to four days. While in surgery they keep me very hydrated - so I could live off that alone for a couple of days. I would then need to try to force some liquid down for a day or two, while the flap gradually closed back to normal. What actually happened is that the flap never closed back. By last Sunday morning I'd lost several pounds, was terribly weak and was on the verge of dehydration. Doug was worried and so was I. My trachea was so open at the top that I cannot even swallow my own saliva without choking. It was a true dilemma." I mean just dilemma, the word dilemma, try to picture what this woman is going through. She says, "Doug took the kids to church and graciously allowed me to pray about what to do. I have chronic pain due to the stitches in the vocal cord area, but when I try to choke down some liquid it burns at a 10 pain level. There was also the concern about pneumonia if I tried to choke down liquids and got too much in my lungs that I couldn't cough out. As I prayed that morning, God began to bring to mind three things. Number one, I've faced major pain like this before. It isn't fun, but I survived by his grace. Number 2, I've faced dehydration before, and the last time I landed in the hospital for 5 days. This time I truly wanted to stay out.

Number 3, I've been called to long fasts on fresh juices, water and vegetable broths before and after the initial few days, began to feel healthier and stronger instead of depleted. So based on prayer and a promise to Doug that we would go to the hospital if I felt faint again or actually did faint, I started my plan. I began having fresh juices, wheat grass juice, water and vitamin-infused water about every two hours. I had to sit outside or in a bathtub as at least half the juice would simply drain through the trach tube. It was a mess and horribly painful. It was like making myself drink fire every time. But after two days I began to feel a little stronger. By day three I didn't have any symptoms of dehydration. Today (Sunday) I'm at about fifty percent strength even though I've lost quite a bit of weight and can still only retain about half of what I drink. The pain continues about the same, around a seven or eight pain level unless I'm drinking, when it shoots up. However, by God's amazing grace I have adjusted to my current "normal" and am able to pace myself to make a meal, do some laundry, pick up the house and do some cleaning, help the kids with school, schedule, et cetera, between periods of rest. That's a great improvement from three solid days in bed or on the couch last weekend! One of my favorite quotes lately has been from Oswald Chambers. He says, 'God is the Master Designer and will never shield you from the requirements of being His son or daughter.' 1 Peter 4:12 says, 'Beloved, do not think it strange

concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing were happening to you.' Rise to the occasion -- do what the trial demands of you! It does not matter how much it hurts as long as it gives God the opportunity to manifest the life of Jesus in your body."

We all know the scripture from *2 Corinthians 12:9*, God says: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.* And we saw that sufficiency, we saw that power. But many of us, myself included, saw it through eyes of unbelief. I mean, nobody could be that patient. Nobody could be that trusting. Nobody could be that anxious to praise a God who appeared to be just ignoring her agonies. See, we saw that power made perfect in Christi's weakness and because we didn't receive the grace, I think we imagined that she didn't either. See, at the center of her fiery furnace was Christi dealing with a unique agony that never seemed to let up, and yet somehow she was uniformly cheerful, optimistic, and encouraging. I think many of us thought if that was me in her place, not a chance, there's no way I'd be able to do that. Some of you have even come up to me and said, "There's no way I could respond like that, no way." I know some of us felt guilty because we thought if I had been Christi, things would have turned out very differently and it would not have been pretty at all. But what God and Christi intend for us to see is that the

grace he gives to those who are at the very center of the struggle is not at all the grace that he gives to those of us who are rubbernecking on the outside.

So before you say I could have never have done that, realize two very important points. The first point is obvious, you and I are not the recipients of that particular grace. The second point is this: Christi got that grace because she knew how to receive it, and it really is a matter of attitude. You see, God's grace is always there for us when we're in that fire, when we're in that flood but it's a grace that can be refused. God warns us in *Hebrews 12:15*, he says: *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.* See, Christi received all of that grace and she received it by fostering an attitude that for many of us is just incredibly highly counterintuitive. She sought out evidences of grace in the midst of circumstances that seemed to have none. You know, there's a grueling bronchoscopy without sedation became an opportunity to thank God for a faster recovery time. The horrific pain of forcing liquids down her throat while sitting in a bathtub gives way to praise and thankfulness that God still gives her the strength to do housework, pray, and read scripture in spite of the pain. God chooses just like he did with the apostle Paul not to remove her thorn in the flesh, and she



responds just like Paul did. *2 Corinthians 12:8: Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

You see, through Christi we got to see this same process worked out in real time in a real person, and what she taught us in that was that attitude is what makes all the difference in the world. Christi had no control whatsoever over her circumstances but she did have control over how she received them, and it was her attitude that directly produced her gratitude and her gratitude made visible the grace of God in her life. Christi's physical pain would have been no different if she was a flat out atheist. I mean, having a focus on Christ doesn't make the pain any less painful, but it did give her a context for her suffering that made all the difference in the world, and her continued attitude of trust in the midst of a trial that had countless setbacks gave her a platform to educate us on how that's done. And we also know that that platform extended to her husband Doug. This is one thing that he wrote. He said this:

"Healing or no healing, the question is do we trust God? Do we really believe that he knows what is best for us and is involved in

this whole process? I was asking myself, 'Do I really believe that God can heal Christi in an instant if he wants to?' That's a tough question for any level of faith. I can answer very quickly intellectually and theologically. Sure he can. But the next logical question then becomes, 'Then why doesn't he?' 'Doesn't he care?' 'Is he not hearing everyone's prayers?' 'Is it my lack of faith that prevents healing?' And a dozen related questions. But then I was struck with a bigger question: 'What takes more faith -- faith in believing God can heal Christi in an instant -- or faith that God is still loving, still sovereign, if he chooses not to -- right now, or never?' Ah. That is challenging. But I want my faith to be so deep, so rooted in what I know to be true about the character of God to know and believe that he is good, he is loving, he is involved, and he will accomplish his perfect will. I want a faith that even though I don't know where it leads, I can have confidence in the one who is leading. So we continue this walk and we will see where it leads."

Christi, I should mention, I just talked to my sister, she's completely healed today. The only lingering she has from that is a rasp in her voice, but she's doing great. But here's the point. The question is do you know where the strength, the power, the peace, and the wisdom that came from that enabled Doug and Christi to respond that way? I think it's pretty evident that Christ was

right with them in the midst of their fiery trials. You see, sometimes you can see Christ in the furnace just like Nebuchadnezzar did. But sometimes you see him in what his grace produces within us when we're in the furnace.

Now Janice and I can attest to this as well. Today -- actually today itself would have been the 30th birthday of our daughter Joanna. She was our eighth child, and she arrived just like any other child arrives. We got to the hospital with plenty of time, went through the typical delivery, they put the baby monitor on it and as soon as that happened we instantly saw the looks on the staff people change. We saw this tremendous flurry of activity, a whole lot of stuff happening and then the news, we hate to tell you and we don't know why, but the baby has died. And then they told us you still have to deliver and you need your strength. Now, I can't begin to tell you what it is like to go from one of the greatest experiences there is, the birth of a child, to one of the worst experiences there is, the death of that child. So we waited the appointed hours until labor actually went through and Janice gave delivery to a perfectly formed, beautiful little girl who happened to be blue and dead. And the nurses and the staff, they were absolutely wonderful, they insisted, they put the baby on Janice and they insist that we take a whole bunch of pictures because they said these experiences are so traumatic we wouldn't be

able to believe this was true unless we had a record of them. We took those pictures 30 years ago. I have yet to look at them. Still way too painful. But I say all of this because I want you to understand exactly what Jesus did in our lives, Janice and my life that day, and how much it mirrored what he did in Nebuchadnezzar's day when he walked in that fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Now, obviously a situation like that creates chaos in the delivery room. In fact I actually got into an argument with one of the doctors who let out his frustration by starting to curse God. And I don't quite remember what I said but I told him, I said, "Look, I don't have the answer to this but I know God is faithful" and there's no doubt in my mind that's exactly what God was. We were ushered into a room on the other side of the wing because obviously nobody wants the kind of vibe associated with us in a place that's celebrating birth, and so Janice and I are sitting in this room in a state of shock. And at some precise moment, God just chose to flood that room with his presence. I mean, there was such an overwhelming palpable sense of his presence that you could almost reach out and touch it. I remember saying to Janice, I said, I don't -- it was such a strange, bizarre feeling, I said, "I've never felt this miserable and this wonderful at the same time," but it was real. And one thing I know for certain, God did not take us around that sorrow, and he didn't take us over that sorrow, he took us through that sorrow. And as we went through it,

we felt every single bit of it but we also felt his presence in a way that only we could. Those who were not in that room with us could only see our situation as rubberneckerers, and that's my point. God publicly met Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the midst of a fiery furnace using Nebuchadnezzar as a witness to show us what he uniquely does when we are in the fire or the flood. God uniquely meets us at the point of our deepest need, and the only way to know that is to go through it. The only way to know that is to experience it.

Now Ben and Carissa have had a pretty rough week, I mean, this was not unexpected but certainly not at all without extreme pain. But one of the things that Ben really wanted me to know and something that I certainly understood was how close to God he felt in the midst of this pain. You see, they were in the fire and they were in the flood and one of the things that they noticed that there in their midst was Christ encouraging them in the midst of their sorrow, encouraging them with his presence and with his grace. And again, us rubberneckerers, we don't get that grace. And each situation is unique because we're all unique, but God was speaking to Ben and Carissa on a whole bunch of different levels throughout this period in many different ways.

And one of the hospice nurses was a gal named Erin and she was

struggling with her Christianity, it was not yet real, and she told Ben that she was blown away by the peace that permeated his household. That peace got her to thinking, because Erin said that so often in these circumstances at times like this people are at each other's throats because of the extreme pressure that they're under. She could -- she said that she could sense the peace of God permeating the entire household; even as a rubbernecker she was feeling the presence of Jesus. But she had another interesting marker that showed that Christ was there with her as well. Shane died on Sunday, last Sunday, and so Erin decided to take that Monday off because she just wanted to process everything that had taken place because she had really grown to love the family, she had grown to love Shane, and she was struggling where does God fit in all of this? So she decided to take a walk and look for a sign from God, some kind of sign that God was really there really in this. And so she felt led to go to the old track that Shane used to compete on even though it was a 25-minute ride and it was pouring rain. This is the track that Shane -- that we went down to visit Shane for his last race a couple of weeks ago. It's actually not a track, it's actually a park and it's got a long walk thru that people race through. But when she got there, she saw obviously the parking lot is completely empty because it was pouring rain. She just started walking asking God for some kind of a sign. And she said to Ben, I don't know, a deer, a bird,

something, just show me something, something that means that you're there, that you're part of this. And she said even though it was raining, there were trees that had leafed out and there was kind of a canopy and the rain was keeping everybody away so she could kind of wander alone with her thoughts because no one was there. So she said as she's walking by herself down the pathway just thinking about Shane, suddenly a racer blows right past her pushing an empty racer's trike, very same kind of device that Shane had when he used to race. There's nobody there at all, it's completely deserted and suddenly this racer appears out of nowhere and blasts right past her. And so she saw that as a sign from God, that he was right there with her as he had been with Shane and with the whole family. And so she came back and she's sharing this story with Carissa. Carissa had been texting her friend Dave who was the one who actually started Shane on these races, the one who started Athletes Serving Athletes, and Dave went on to tell her that that very same Monday he, too, was in a funk over Shane's death, and he realized he had not been out with the trike for months and he, too, felt led to go to the very same trail. He figured it was pouring rain, there's not going to be anybody there so I can go for one last run with Shane. So there were only two people on that trail that Monday, neither of them had ever met, neither of them had any idea why they were drawn to that rain-soaked spot. Now, when Erin told Carissa about this guy with an empty trike passing her by, she

remembered Dave telling her that he was drawn to one last race at the track which was empty except for one lone girl walking. Neither of them of ever met each other, neither of them even knew each other. They had no idea that God had arranged that meeting. Coincidence? I think not. And whether it's the fiery furnace or a bathtub or a hospital room or even on an abandoned trail, when you are in the fire, when you are in the flood, God will meet you there.

This is what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to say God is true. I'm trying to tell you God is faithful, that what he says he will do, he will do. And the reason why Nebuchadnezzar stared into that furnace and saw a fourth person was because God wanted to let him know and through him let every one of us know that there would never be a fire or a flood where we would be alone.

Now, as I mentioned before, Ben had asked me a few months beforehand to build him a cremation box for Shane's ashes. They wanted the box to say but one thing on it, they just wanted just right on the top "John 10:10." *John 10:10*, the verse means: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" See, they knew that Shane's life was a testimony to the truth of that verse. I mean, Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy was the enemy's tool that he used to



try to steal, try to kill, try to destroy, and by the grace of God Shane understood that. But he also understood that every single bit of life on this planet is a battle. I say it over and over again, we are in a proxy war, there's a war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and we are the ones who are here in the middle engaged in the battle. Jesus Christ left heaven as very God to become one of us and one with us, to live out his life unlike any life that was ever lived before and that is to live it out perfectly. And having done that, he laid down on a cross as payment for your sin and my sin and Shane understood that and by faith he accepted that sacrifice of Christ. He also understood that Christ alone could give him the means of living an abundant life even though the enemy he knew was constantly trying to steal, kill, and destroy. Shane did that by focusing on the kingdom first and his struggles at life second. His obituary said this: "Shane shared that he was grateful for the 'gift' of DMD because it led him to opportunities and encounters that he may never have had without it. His 24 years were full of good and hard but Shane chose to live them as full as he could." I don't know a better five-word description of what life lived for the kingdom consists of. It's a life full of good and hard. Ben and Carissa would be the very first ones to tell you that God was fully there for both of those. And whether it's Shadrach, Meshach or Abednego or Stephen or Christi or Shane or Janice and myself, we

can all testify to the truth of God's word and that fourth person who was in that furnace that day. *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Let's pray.*

*Father, I thank you for the grace that you give, I thank you for the faithfulness of your love for us, I thank you that each and every one of us can trust whether it's fire or flood, that you will be there with us. I just continue to pray for Ben and Carissa, I continue to pray for the celebration to take place next week of your faithfulness to him and your faithfulness to them, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*