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

**May 8, 2016**

**The Fiery Furnace**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just praise you and thank you for the amazing love that you have. Lord, how can it be that you would die for some such as you and me. Thank you, Lord, for that gift, and thank you, Lord, for your willingness to be our sacrifice. And Father, this morning as we gather again we're going to be opening up your book and we're asking for another gift, that is the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, that you would accompany us as we open up your book, that you would give us the ability to grasp and understand what you're saying there because without your Spirit, it is a hopeless task. Accompany us this morning, Lord, enable us to make these things of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Have you ever heard the phrase "it's all good"? You know, it's a catch phrase, and it's a catch phrase that's sometimes used as a polite and kind of gracious way to excuse somebody for some kind of mistake or faux pas. And it's easy to say "it's all good" when the mistake is of little consequence. It gets harder to say the more

consequential the mistake. I want to talk this morning about a believer's mindset. A believer's mindset is the ability to look at anything that life throws at you, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and say to yourself and actually mean it, "it's all good." It's a practical way of putting into place the scripture we've all heard about many, many times in *Romans 8:28*: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* You know, we've all heard this verse over and over and over again and we all believe it's all good, but I think only up to a point. You see, buried in most of our hearts is the notion that if we do the right thing by God, then he's going to do the right thing by us. I mean, that is if we play by the rules and do what we are supposed to be doing as believers in Jesus Christ, then it will all be good 'cause God is going to bless us. And you know, there are many, many verses in scripture that seem to be suggesting that that really is the case. *Galatians 6:7* says: *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* *Romans 2:6* says: *"God will render to each one according to his works."* *Proverbs 21:21* says: *Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.* *Psalms 37* says: *For the LORD loves justice and will not abandon His faithful ones. They are kept safe forever, but the children of the wicked will be destroyed.* You might read these and think, well, okay, play by the rules and you will find life and

righteousness and honor, you will be kept safe forever but the children of the wicked, well, they're going to be destroyed. Now does that mean that if I -- if I just exercise enough faith, maybe I can guarantee for myself and my children this measure of safety and security. Well, the answer to that question depends largely on what you define as safety and security. You know, we tend to define it temporarily; God defines it eternally. And when we assume that our faith is there to sort of protect us from sin or sickness and disease and all the other parts that consist of living in this fallen world, then we are setting ourselves up for disappointment in God. And it's an easy misconception to fall prey to. I mean, if you remember the incident with Jesus and the blind man, the disciples, they come across this man who's been born blind and the one question they have for Jesus is: *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* You see, the disciples were convinced that the only reason why anyone would be born blind was because, somehow or other, he broke the rules. I mean, if it wasn't him, it must have been his parents because they thought that's how God operates. I mean, you play by the rules, God's going to bless you. You refuse to play by the rules and you have to be willing to accept the consequences even if they include blinding you or your children. Well, Jesus rejects both of those premises right off the bat. He says in *John 9:3*: *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be*

*displayed in him.*" And by the way, you want a definition of what glory is, it's right there, "*that the works of God might be displayed in him.*" And so we ask, is Jesus saying that glorifying God trumps everything in an individual's life? I mean, is he saying that this opportunity to glorify God afforded this man through his blindness more than offset the life that he had to spend in darkness? Well, the answer is yes, that is precisely what Jesus was saying. Now, I would suggest to you that folks not only have a hard time understanding this, I think they have a hard time not being offended by that notion. But if you think that God's glory is not worth a lifetime of blindness, you don't fully understand the glory of God. And in order to understand this, I would like to suggest to you three things that we need to understand. Number one, what the glory of God is all about; number two, what displaying this glory sometimes entails; and number three, why a commitment to God's glory will never let you down. What the glory of God is all about, what displaying it entails, and why a commitment to God's glory never lets you down.

This morning we're going to be looking at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. And if you're not at all familiar with that, let me lay out the story for you according to *Daniel 3:1-6*, it says this: *King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set*

*it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasures, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasures, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."*

Now the last time we looked into Daniel, we asked how Nebuchadnezzar could go from acknowledging Daniel's God as the source of all wisdom who enabled Daniel to perfectly analyze and understand his dream, to this blatant act of idol worship that he demanded of everyone less than one chapter later, I mean, this is Nebuchadnezzar saying in verse 6, *"Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately believe cast into a burning fiery*

*furnace.*" So we ask how did that happen so quickly? Well, the answer to that question is actually kind of simple, I mean, Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world at that time and what he -- whatever he said became law. I said if there's one thing that he didn't have any use for, it was subtlety and the one thing I mentioned that I guess we could begrudgingly say we owe a debt of gratitude to Nebuchadnezzar for is this complete lack of subtlety. You see, Nebuchadnezzar had the heart of an idol worshiper but he also had the power to take the desires of his heart and make them law. I pointed out last time there really are only three things that separate the heart of Nebuchadnezzar from the heart of all of us, from the heart of you and me and they are time and place and power. You know, Nebuchadnezzar, he was from another time, he was from a far, far distant place, and by any and all standards he had all the power in the world that he needed to enact whatever it is that he wanted. But make no mistake, his idol worshiping heart is no different than the heart that you and I were born with. Nebuchadnezzar focused his idol worship on bringing glory to this 90-foot tall golden statute. And whether it represented him or some other deity, we don't -- we don't really know, but it doesn't matter because in his heart, we know he was committed to the worship of idols. And as I mentioned before, if you think this is some kind of ancient historical practice that's no longer part of our culture today, I would direct you to Tim

Keller's point that we still have those geographical areas that the Greeks had when they worshiped their own idols. We still have Boston with Harvard, MIT and its great medical facilities, as an area still dominated by Athena, the goddess of reason. I mean, it's the place where intellectual brilliance is a dominating idol. And New York, on the other hand, with its financial centers and Wall Street is dominated by Artemis, the goddess of success, while LA and Hollywood are dominated by Aphrodite, we're familiar with that, because L.A. is the place where what matters most is physical appearance. And the point is, we still give glory to these gods and goddesses every time we pour our hearts, our energies, and our resources into growing or maintaining the very worship that each one of those requires. You see, worship is best described as worth -- W-O-R-T-H -- ship. Worth ship. It's what we put value and worth into. And whether we know it or not, whether it's Athena or Artemis, Aphrodite or the Lord Jesus Christ, we all serve the gods that we worship. And we worship them because we have to worship something because we're created by God for worship. That's what we're here for. And if it's not God, it will be by definition an idol. Worship is at the core of our makeup. We're the only creatures created in the image of God for the express purpose of glorifying him. That's how and why God created us. I mean, that doesn't mean that God is some gigantic egomaniac in the sky demanding that all of his sycophantic followers sit around all day

telling him how great he is. I mean, could you imagine a God who is that desperate for affirmation that he would have to create creatures just for the purpose of patting him on the back? You know, I've said this many times, how excited would you be if you got a bunch of insects to bow down to you as something great? You know, if you were able to train a whole nest of ants so that they stood in formation and spelled out "Tom is the greatest," I mean, that would be pretty interesting, it would be a curiosity you could show your friends, but trusting your self worth is not going to be hanging on getting insects to glorify you.

So why does God insist that we glorify him? Well, the answer, the answer requires some reflection. We worship a God who points us as the crown of his creation, to the best end and the highest goal there is. And it's not success, it's not wealth, it's not happiness, it happens to be God himself. I mean think of it, if there was something higher than God to point us to, God wouldn't be God, and what he's pointing us to, it would be God. God points us constantly to his glory because that is the source of our greatest joy and satisfaction. God insists that we glorify him because he wants for us the very best we were designed for, and that design is fulfilled when we see our greatest joy in serving him. And so the glory of God is all about John Piper's famous statement: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."



That leads to my second point, what displaying his glory sometimes entails, and that brings us to our story in the text this morning. Now, it's pretty well known what happens, I mean, King Nebuchadnezzar demands everyone fall down and worship the idol and everybody does, except, except for three: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I want to focus next on the dialogue that they have with Nebuchadnezzar after he finds out that these three will not bow down. This is *Daniel 3:8-18*, it says this: *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready*

*when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*

Now before we actually get to this dialogue that takes place between Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Nebuchadnezzar, I want you to notice how quickly Nebuchadnezzar's love for and dedication to Daniel's God has disappeared. I mean, if you remember back just one chapter, these are the very words that Nebuchadnezzar greeted Daniel with after Daniel had completely understood and analyzed and broken down the dream that the king had. This is what the king said to him in *Daniel 2:47*, it says: *The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remind at the king's court.*

Okay. So only one chapter ago Daniel and his God could do no

wrong. Now Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego find themselves staring into the murderous rage of Nebuchadnezzar. And notwithstanding, these three men that he had in front of them were by far the top men in his administration, they were wiser, more trustworthy, and more competent than any of their accusers. But you know, none of that meant a thing when it came down to worshiping idols. I mean Nebuchadnezzar's rage knew no bounds and he was quite prepared to take his three top notch administrators and roast them alive for refusing to worship his idol. And you know, there's a take away for us in this. It's this, it's please, please, never ever think that you can somehow mollify or assuage or somehow tame the innate, often times unconscious hatred that man has for the one God who trumps all of his idols simply by trying hard. It doesn't matter how good, how competent, how trustworthy, how loyal you are to your boss, to your friends, to your relatives, or your co-workers, in the end, your loyalty to Christ is going to be seen as the ultimate threat.

R.C. Sproul illustrated that threat greatly, I think, in a story he told in his book *The Holiness of God*. Let me just read to you just briefly, this actually took place, he says this, he says:

A few years ago one of the leading golfers on the professional tour was invited to play in a foursome with Gerald Ford (then president

of the United States), Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. The golfer was especially in awe playing with Ford and Billy. After the round of golf was finished, one of the other pros came up to the golfer and asked, "Hey, what was it like playing with the president and with Billy Graham? The pro unleashed a torrent of cursing, and in a disgusted manner said, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat." With that he turned on his heel and stormed off, heading for the practice tee. His friend followed the angry pro to the practice tee. The pro took out his driver and started to beat out balls in fury. His neck was crimson, and it looked as if steam was coming from his ears. His friend said nothing. He sat on a bench and watched. After a few minutes the anger of the pro was spent. He settled down. His friend said quietly, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?" The pro heaved an embarrassed sigh and said, "No, he didn't even mention religion. I just had a bad round." Astonishing, Billy Graham had said not a word about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pro had stormed away after the game accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat. How can we explain this? It's really not difficult. Billy Graham didn't have to say a word; he didn't have to give a single sideward glance to make the pro feel uncomfortable. Billy Graham is so identified with religion, so associated with the things of God, that his very presence is enough to smother the wicked person who flees when no one pursues. Luther

was right, pagans do tremble at the rustling of a leaf. They feel the hound of heaven breathing down their neck. They feel crowded by holiness, even if it is made present only by an imperfect, partially sanctified human vessel.

See, there's only one way to completely avoid some variation of Nebuchadnezzar's rage when you refuse to bow down to the idols that make up our culture. You want to know how to avoid this completely? Just keep your head down and your mouth shut. I mean, as long as people don't know or identify you as a child of God, chances are you're going to be fine. But make no mistake about it, eventually someone's going to point to some kind of 90-foot idol and whether subtly or not so subtly demand that in some way you have to bow down to it. The truly sad part is if you've grown used to and comfortable with compromising for the world, you're going to have a real hard time refusing. Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* And should you refuse to bow down, don't be surprised at the anger you encounter. See, when it comes down to it, man's hatred for the God who rules over him will eventually trump anything you have to offer. I get the impression often times that people think if somehow you just soft peddle the gospel, if we somehow just kind of sidle up to those who are outside the kingdom

and show them all the good things that come from being a Christian, the trustworthiness, the loyalty, the idea of servanthood, then we can be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we're just kind of helping Babylon grow and prosper. But eventually though, just like they did, you're going to run into a Nebuchadnezzar and he's not going to just let bygones be bygones and leave you to your own God, and he'll be pointing you to his own version of this 90-foot golden idol and insist that some way or somehow you bow down and worship it. Today that idol is diversity, that idol is tolerance, that idol is whatever the culture says it is, because popular culture is very busy now erecting that idol. And Christians who've been able to live in relative comfort with a culture that used to mirror its ideals are now finding themselves having to make choices. In the past there was a great deal of social agreement and overlap between the gospel and our culture. That's pretty much gone. You know, marriage was considered to be sacred and between a man and women, adultery was a cultural sin, abortion was out of the question, so was pornography. But you and I both know those days are now part of our cultural past. There is no more moral consensus and now everything, everything is up for grabs. You know, no doubt some of you have been shocked and surprised by the viciousness of the response that some people have had towards some of the areas where being a Christian makes us different. These are areas that now define themselves in cultural movements like homosexual marriage

and transgender bathrooms. But make no mistake about it, people don't just disagree with those who hold differing opinions like us, they view us as a threat and our positions as pure bigotry and hatred worthy of their bigotry and hatred. Our culture has become our Nebuchadnezzar and the anger is now palpable. And you're not going to out-argue or for that matter out-charm an unconscious antipathy toward God because it is unconscious. They don't know it. They don't sense it. They just feel it in their gut. You see, that golf pro's rage is a window into how folks view folks who take their faith seriously. That's not just my opinion, that's a fact. Listen to what Jesus said in *John 15:18*, he said: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* God further says in *Ephesians 2* that every one of us enters into this life by our very natures as children of wrath. And in *Romans 8:7*, God says: *The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

But here's the good news for us. You see, when you became a child of God you left that world of hostility behind. By God's grace you saw the sweetness and the wonder and the joy and the beauty of God while the rest of the world still sees him as a meddlesome tyrant

and his followers as knuckle-dragging bigots. The point is no one, no one has ever come by a good opinion of God naturally. It's only by the supernatural grace of God that any of us have had our eyes opened and our hearts transplanted and transformed so that we now love a God we used to either consciously or unconsciously hate. It's just a fact, to everyone outside of born again believers in Christ has within them an implacable hostility toward God, Christ, and the gospel. I mean, it's God who says not only does man not submit to God's law, refuse to submit to God's law but that it's far, far worse than that, he says he cannot submit to God's law.

So given the fact that folks don't want to hear it and that they are hostile to the gospel, what does giving glory to God entail? Sometimes it entails risking everything. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood that perfectly. They stared right into the face of Nebuchadnezzar who was sputtering with rage and threatening them with death by fire, and this is what they said: *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, 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. 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."*



Now there are three critical words uttered by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in their dialogue with King Nebuchadnezzar that are key to understanding point three and that's why a commitment to God's glory will never let you down, and those three words are "but if not." Those are some of the most enormously powerful words ever uttered in all of scripture. It's the ancient version of "it's all good." That's what they're saying. And if you understand what is behind that three-word phrase, you, too, can access the power that enabled them to say it. "But if not" is the key to faith placed in exactly the right place, and that's where the power comes from.

See, there are three different ways that we can approach our faith, two of which will only result in disappointment with God, one of which brings him glory and you peace and power. There's the effort approach, there's the event approach, and there's the character approach. See, the effort approach attempts to control my future by the amount of effort, the amount of work I put into my faith. You see, if I spend hours in prayer and Bible study and counsel all expecting a specific answer that I'm looking for, well then I'm not really acting in faith. Instead I'm using my faith as a bargaining chip to produce the results that I want. You know, when I was a Catholic I used to think that lighting a candle would help, and heck, if lighting one would help, two would help twice as much. You know, if a novena would help, then maybe I'll get a mass card

as well. That's the effort of faith approach. But don't think that we Protestants don't do the exact same thing. I mean, it's as ancient an error as the disciples wondering, "*Who sinned, the blind man or his parents.*" We think if I do A plus B, God therefore must do C. And when our response to disappointment is "I can't believe you didn't come through, Lord, I mean, I prayed about this, I even fasted, how could you let me down?" If that's your understanding, you have invested in the effort approach. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it would have been an appeal to God based not on what he had done but on what they had done. They would have reflected back on the fact that they had fasted of the fine foods of Babylon, that they had gathered together with Daniel when they were being sought out for execution, that they gathered together for prayer and they would have totaled up all of the efforts that they had made and concluded that surely God must bless our efforts and save us from the fiery furnace, but that's not what they did. See, "but if not" freely admits that any and all efforts on my part are in no way designed to shape and mold God's answers according to my desires. "But if not" says in the end what matters is God's will, God's purpose, and God's design for his future, and I'm part of that design. And as one of his children, I can say with confidence that whether I live or whether I die, whatever happens, it's all good. Fully trusting God with my future frees me up from the stress of believing it's my job to shape my future when

it's not, it's God's. *Proverbs 16* says: *The heart of man plans his way but the LORD establishes his steps.* I tell folks all the time, plan your future as best as you can but then realize it's always only in God's hands.

And next there's the event approach. See, if you are convinced that because your desired end is good and godly, something that in your mind advances the kingdom as a right and honorable thing to do and therefore because of the nature of the event, well, God has to bless it, well you're falling into a trap. I can't believe God didn't bless my effort that evangelizing my cousin or my friend or my co-worker. I mean, I try to give him the gospel and it was a disaster. What happened? God, I want to go to seminary. God, I want to go to the mission field. I want to be wealthy and support a dozen missionaries. I want to be somebody in the kingdom of God. God, I prayed about your will and I know the scripture is consistent with your will on this, so I was certain that you would bless it, but you didn't. It's an easy trap to fall into particularly when you're doing God's work. And how could God not support advancing the kingdom and glorifying himself? I mean, it's easy to become highly discouraged thinking that God at the very least would not make advancing his kingdom so difficult. As somebody at the conference put it, he said making decisions about anything regarding the future of myself and/or the kingdom based on

my own thoughts, my own knowledge, my own perspective is like trying to write a review of a movie having seen only three or four seconds of it. You might be able to capture some tiny little part of it but the vast majority of it still lies unexamined, unexplained, and largely in the territory of ignorance. So it is with our understanding of God's plans for the future.

So let's picture Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, if they were event driven in their faith, they would certainly have pointed to the enormity of the event itself. I mean after all, Nebuchadnezzar's making a direct challenge against God in front of the entire nation. God, this is your chance to put yourself against a 90-foot tall idol that Nebuchadnezzar has placed before you. So what's to lose? I mean after all, it was centuries before when Elijah engaged the whole nation with his confrontation with the prophets of Baal, and remember what happened there, I mean, God answered spectacularly in that case. Surely they could have thought God's going to answer our prayers and protect us from the fiery furnace, but God told Elijah to go out and confront those false prophets and he didn't give those instructions to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I mean, they understood that all of the potential for glory that this confrontation contained. They understood it was there but they also understood that the final outcome was not theirs to decide. They also understood that God's

ways are not our ways and so they uttered that key phrase "but if not." Lord, it would be amazing if you demonstrated your power in front of Nebuchadnezzar and his entire nation arrayed against you. You are sovereign, you are Lord, and you are in charge of the present and the future, and if your plans are otherwise, it's all good. See, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego rejected a faith based on effort, and they understood that any and every event is under the sovereign control of God's perfect will. So what gave them the ability to respond like that? Well, their faith was based not on effort or events but on character, the character of God. See, I've mentioned before, they had the testimony of God's character and the history of their people. They knew what God had done in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all the way up to Moses and the rescue of an entire nation from slavery in Egypt. They had seen centuries of God's faithfulness reflected in what he had done to save, protect, and empower his people. And in addition to that they had their own unique histories of God's faithfulness to them. They knew that he had maintained their health and appearance when they refused to eat the king's food, that he had answered their prayers by giving Daniel not only the wisdom to interpret the king's dream but also the details of the dream that the king himself had had. They knew God on a macro level and on a micro level, and so they knew him enough to trust him regardless the circumstance. It was that level of trust in the character of God that enabled them to

say right to the king's face, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, 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. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up." Now, you've got to understand, these words are spoken to a king while a furnace is being stoked and the probability of being burned alive is very real. It didn't matter. What mattered was that God could be trusted for any outcome including torture and death.

So we ask, where does that strength come from and how do we gain that perspective for ourselves as well? And again, just to review, number one, what is the glory of God all about? It's the greatest means to the highest ends and that end is God himself. What does displaying his glory sometimes entail? Sometimes it entails losing everything including our lives. And third, what will a commitment to God's glory -- why will a commitment to God's glory never let you down? Short answer: Because God will never let you down.

David Platt was one of the final speakers at the T4G conference, and he spoke about the reformers, and he entitled his message: "Why Reformers Died in Their Day and How We Must Live in Ours." And he spoke about men like John Rogers, Rowland Taylor, and

Rawlins White who all gloriously marched confidently to their fiery deaths proclaiming the same gospel that we believe in. Matt Chandler spoke of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, two other believers who willingly embraced being burned at the stake rather than deny their Lord. And in each and every case, they could have escaped by simply remaining silent or recanting what it is they had said. Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their actions said "but if not" and "it's all good." But in their case they paid the ultimate price. Latimer and Ridley were two faithful ministers who were brought before Mary Queen of Scots for refusing to deny that salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone. They refused and so they were brought out together on stakes to be burned and Latimer said to Ridley, "Be of good comfort Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." How could they say that? Where did the courage to do that come from? It came from the fact that they were not alone. They said that because God was right there walking them through it. Listen to God's promise in *Isaiah 43*. He says this, he says: *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.*

Now is God saying no one's ever going to be burned up in a fire? Not at all. I mean we know that hundreds of reformers met their death by being burned at the stake. What God was saying is that no matter what this world throws at you, I will be right there with you giving you the grace, the strength, and the power to endure it. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wind up in the furnace, they see this promise played out literally. They find there's someone else in there beside the three. Nebuchadnezzar said in *Daniel 3:25*: "*But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.*" This was the pre incarnate Christ himself in the midst of the fire with them. What God did literally with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego he does spiritually with every one of his children. He promises to walk through the very worst of it with us. I mean none of us pass through the waters alone, none of us walk through the fires alone, and we have seen over and over and over again that God is faithful and whether it's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Latimer and Ridley or even my grandson Shane, we know that God will not abandon us. *Psalm 23* says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* It's been said you don't get boiling oil grace until you're thrown into boiling oil and we have seen it time and time and time again, God is faithful. And when people go through super human



tortures and struggles, it is because they are accompanied by a supernatural grace that they experience and we don't. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood as well that nothing was more important than the glory of God, and it was their understanding of that that gave them a strength and a power that could stare death right in the face and say if God wants to grant us life, safety, and protection from that furnace, that's exactly what's going to happen; but if not, it's all good. Can you say that? Do you believe that? Do you have the believer's mindset? Would you like to have a strength, a power, and a peace that can stare at death itself and say "it's all good"? Then fix your eyes on the One who alone can give you that power. Trust in the character of God who says: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you for who you are, I thank you for being the God that will not abandon us, the God that accompanies us through whatever it is. I just think of the conversation I had early this morning with Ben about that -- that last moments, those last moments of Shane's life on earth and how intensely Ben felt your presence. Lord, we just -- we look at people in these circumstances and we wonder because we're not the ones receiving the grace, but you are the one who gives the grace. And it is*

true, you don't get boiling oil grace until you're in boiling oil.  
I thank you, Lord, that that is a fact, that is the truth, that is  
the source of our power. I pray that each of us would understand  
that and would trust in that explicitly. And I pray this in Jesus'  
name. Amen.