

CONSOLATION IN THE FURNACE

NO. 662

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”
Daniel 3:25.*

THE narrative of the glorious boldness and marvelous deliverance of the three holy children, or rather champions, is well calculated to excite in the minds of believers firmness and steadfastness in upholding the truth in the teeth of tyranny and in the very jaws of death. Let young men especially, since these were young men, learn from their example both in matters of faith in religion, and matters of integrity in business, never to sacrifice their consciences. Lose all rather than lose your integrity, and when all else is gone, still hold fast to a clear conscience as the rarest jewel which can adorn the bosom of a mortal.

It were no waste of time for the preacher to spend half-a-dozen mornings in insisting again and again upon the necessity of the Christian being obedient universally and constantly to the dictates of his conscience, for this is an age requiring sturdy independence and stern adherence to the truth. As to whether the most severe precision of integrity will turn out to be the best policy or no, I shall not care to dispute. I am talking just now, not to men guided by the will-o'-the-wisp of policy, but by the pole star of divine light, and I beseech them to follow the right at all hazards. When you see no present advantage, then walk by faith and not by sight.

I do pray you, beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, do my God the honor to trust Him when it comes to matters of loss for the sake of principle. See whether He will be your debtor! See if He does not even in this life prove His word, that “Godliness is great gain,” and that they who “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, shall have all these things added unto them.” Mark you, if in the providence of God it should be the case that you are, and continue to be a loser by conscience, you shall find that if the Lord pays you not back in the silver of earthly prosperity, He will discharge His promise in the gold of spiritual joy, and I would have you remember that a man’s life consists not in the abundance of that which he possesses.

To have a clear conscience, to wear a guileless spirit, to have a heart void of offense is greater riches than the mines of Ophir could yield or the traffic of Tyre could win. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and inward contention therewith. An ounce of heart’s-ease is worth a ton of gold, and a drop of innocence is better than a sea of flattery. Burn, Christian, if it comes to that, but never turn from the right way. Die, but never deny the truth. Lose all to buy the truth, but sell it not, even though the price were the treasure and honor of the whole world, for “what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

But my particular design in referring to the narrative this morning, was not to use the whole of it as an incentive to young Christians, by way of earnest advice, although I confess I feel much inclined to do so, but I have this one verse on my mind, wherein the astonished despot saw his late victims quietly surviving the flames which he intended for their instant destruction. I desire to use his exclamation as a consolation to afflicted Christians everywhere. Concentrate then your thoughts on the words before us, and may the Holy Spirit be our instructor.

I. We will commence by gazing into the place WHERE GOD’S PEOPLE OFTEN ARE.

In the text we find three of them in a burning fiery furnace, and singular as this may be literally, it is no extraordinary thing spiritually, for, to say the truth, it is the usual place where saints are found. The ancients fabled of the salamander, that it lived in the fire. The same can be said of the Christian without any fable whatever. The ancient church, in a favorite metaphor, described itself as a ship. Where should the ship be, but in the sea? Now the sea is an unstable element, frequently vexed with storms. It is a troubled sea which cannot rest, and so the Christian finds this mortal life to be far from smooth and seldom settled.

It is rather a wonder when a Christian is not in trial, for to wanderers in a wilderness discomfort and need will naturally be the rule rather than the exception. It is through “much tribulation” that we inherit the kingdom. There is no life so joyous as that of a man bound for the Celestial City. And on the other hand, there is no life which involves so much conflict as does the life of a pilgrim to the skies. The furnaces into which Christians are cast are of various sorts. Perhaps we may divide them into three groups.

First, there is *the furnace which men kindle*. As if there were not enough misery in the world, men are the greatest tormentors of their fellow-men. The elements in all their fury, wild beasts in all their ferocity, and famine and pestilence in all their horrors have scarcely proved such foes to man, as men themselves have been. Religious animosity is always the worst of all hatreds, and incites to the most fiendish deeds. Persecution is as unsparing as death, and as cruel as the grave. The believer in Jesus, who is one of a people everywhere spoken against, must expect to be thrown into the furnace of persecution by his fellow-men. “If the world hate you,” says our Lord, “it hated me before it hated you.” “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Some suppose that these words are out of date—old-fashioned words, words that refer only to apostolic times. I answer, you are out of the apostolic faith, or else you would painfully find them to be still standing in all their force. At times the Christian feels the heat of the furnace of *open persecution*. What multitudes of saints have mounted to heaven like Elijah, in a chariot of fire. Their seraphic spirits found a safe way to heaven through the flames, for they were guarded by ministering spirits whom God has made as flames of fire. Thousands of the precious sons of Zion have been left to rot in dungeons, or have been slain upon the mountain side, or have perished in penury and want. And to this day there be many that endure trials of cruel mocking, and are in various painful ways made to bear the cross, for if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution.

Another furnace is that of *oppression*. In the iron furnace of Egypt the children of Israel were made to do hard bondage in brick and in mortar. And doubtless many of God’s people are in positions where they are little better than slaves. Oppression is far from dead. Under the most free form of government there is always a possibility for the heads of households and the masters of establishments to practice the most galling oppression towards those whom they dislike. And doubtless many choice spirits are still trodden down as straw is trodden for the dunghill.

There is also the furnace of *slander*. The ripest of fruit will be pecked at most by the birds. Those who have most of God’s image will have most of the world’s contempt. Expect not that the world shall speak well of you, for it never gave your Master a good word. “Shall the disciple be above his master, or the servant above his Lord?” Expect to be misunderstood—that is man’s infirmity. Expect to be misrepresented—that is his willful hatred.

A very strenuous effort is being made just now to mark our denomination with the famous “S. S.,” which was the old brand of the Puritan “Sower of Sedition.” This slander is very ancient, for in Nehemiah’s day the accusation ran, “This city of Jerusalem of old made sedition against kings,” and this is the charge now against our missionaries, and indeed the whole of us, that we are accomplices with those who stir up the people to sedition.

Sirs, we shall not disclaim the fact that we are ever swift to vindicate the liberties of all men, and are little given to flatter tyrants whether in Jamaica, or elsewhere. On the contrary, our witness is very loud

and clear that there is one Lord who will execute righteousness and judgment for all who are oppressed. We hate the treading down of the needy, and we abhor wholesale butchery quite as much when perpetrated by Englishmen as when laid to the door of Turks or Russians, and however unfashionable it may be, we maintain the opinion that liberty is the birthright of every man, not only the liberty which permits his neck to go free from a chain, but the liberty which allows the exercise of the rights of manhood.

Suffering humanity is to be aided even when it wears the ebony hue, and high-handed wrong is to be impeached even when the much despised negro is its victim. It can never be too much lamented that the terrible passions excited by years of wrong should have led to a riot so fierce and cruel, but we must remember that oppression makes even wise men mad, and in justice we must lay the onus of the outbreak, not alone at the door of those unhappy and uneducated men who were goaded to this passionate display of wrath, but we must give the greatest measure of blame to the men of standing, wealth, and education, who have laid grievous burdens upon these people, and refused to hear their earnest cries and grant their justifiable demands. The infernal revenge taken by their enemies almost exonerates me from even this word of apology, for it alone is sufficient proof of the spirit which has dominated over the black race, and compelled the unhappy victims to rise against it.

But of course it will still be insisted that the Baptists are at the bottom of the outbreak, and so God's church will be the scapegoat for offenders. We are the friends of liberty, but we never taught rebellion. We endeavor to implant manly principles of independence and freedom, but we put side-by-side the gentle precepts of the loving Jesus. Yet scandals of every sort we expect to receive, and we count them no strange thing when they happen to us.

Secondly, there is a *furnace which Satan blows* with three great bellows—some of you have been in it. It is hard to bear, for the prince of the power of the air has great mastery over human spirits. He knows our weak places, and can strike so as to cut us to the very quick. He fans the fire with the blast of *temptation*. The evil one knows our besetting sins, our infirmities of temper, and how we can be most readily provoked. He understands how to suit his bait to his fish, and his trap to his bird.

At times the most earnest Christian will be compelled to cry out, "My steps had well-nigh gone; my feet had well-nigh slipped." The Savior went through this furnace in the wilderness, and was thrice tempted of the devil. And in the wilderness of this life God's people frequently experience temptations of the most horrible kind.

Then he works the second bellows of *accusation*. He hisses into the ear, "Your sins have destroyed you! The Lord has quite forsaken you! Your God will be gracious no more!" He tells us that we are hypocrites, that our experience has been fancy, that our faith is mere presumption, that our glorying has been a hectoring boast, and the very sins which, as a tempter, he himself incited us to commit, he brings against us when he assumes his favorite character of "the accuser of the brethren." Unless we are graciously comforted under the attacks of the roaring lion, we shall be almost ready to give up all hope.

Then he will fill us with *suggestions of blasphemy*. For while tormenting us with insinuations, he has a way of uttering foul things against God, and then casting them into our hearts as if they were our own. He can sow the infernal seed of blasphemy in our souls, and then tell us that these are the native plants of our own hearts. He lays his black offspring at our door, as if they were our own home-born children. And this sometimes is very hard to bear, when curses against God and His Christ will come across our soul, and though we hate them with perfect hatred, yet we cannot get rid of them.

And thirdly, *there is a furnace which God Himself prepares for His people*. There is the furnace of *physical pain*. How soon is the strong man brought low! We who rejoiced in health are in a few moments made to mourn and moan, not in weakness merely, but in pain and anguish. He only thinks little of pain who is a stranger to it.

A furnace still worse perhaps is that of *bereavement*. The child sickens, the wife is gradually declining, the husband is smitten down with a stroke, friend after friend departs as star by star grows

dim. We bitterly cry with Job, “Lover and friend have You put far from me, and my acquaintance unto darkness.”

Then added to this there will crowd in upon us *temporal losses and sufferings*. The business which we thought would enrich, impoverishes. We build the house, but providence plucks it down with both its hands. We hoist the sail and seek to make headway, but we are driven by a back wind far from the desired haven “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.”

I cannot multiply the description of these crosses which our heavenly Father in His mysterious providence lays upon His beloved ones. Certain is it that, like the waves of the sea, the drops of rain, the sands of the wilderness, and the leaves of the forest the griefs of the Lord’s people are innumerable. Into the central heat of the fire does the Lord cast His saints, and mark you this, He casts them there because they are His own beloved and dearly loved people. I do not see the goldsmith putting dross into the furnace—what would be the good of it? It would be a waste of fuel and labor. But he thrusts the crucible full of gold into the hottest part of the fire and heaps on coals till the heat is terrible.

Some of you have no crosses. You are like Moab, “settled on your lees”—“you are not emptied from vessel to vessel,” because you are reprobate, and God cares not for you—but the pure gold is put into the furnace to make it purer still. As silver is purified in a furnace of earth seven times, simply because it is silver, so are saints afflicted because of their preciousness in the sight of the Lord. Men will not be at such pains to purify iron as they will with silver, for when iron is brought to a tolerable degree of purity it works well, but silver must be doubly refined, till no dross is left. Men do not cut common pebbles on the lapidary’s wheel, but the diamond must be vexed again, and again, and again with sharp cuttings, and even so must the believer.

The context reminds us that *sometimes the Christian is exposed to very peculiar trials*. The furnace was heated seven times hotter. It was hot enough when heated once. But I suppose that Nebuchadnezzar had pitch and tar, and all kinds of combustibles thrown in to make it flame out with greater vehemence. Truly at times the Lord appears to deal thus with His people. It is a peculiarly fierce heat which surrounds them, and they cry out, “Surely I am the man that has seen affliction—I may take precedence of all others in the realm of sorrow.”

This is not so, remember, for princes have sat in the king’s gate with their heads covered with ashes, and the best of men who eat bread at JEHOVAH’s table this day, have had to say, “You have filled me with wormwood, and broken my teeth with gravel-stones.” The path of sorrow is well frequented, beaten down, and trodden by hosts of the chosen ones of God who have found that the path of sorrow, and that path, alone, leads to the place where sorrow is unknown.

I do not like to leave this point without observing too, that these holy champions *were helpless when thrown into the furnace*. They were cast in bound, and many of us have been cast in bound, too, so that we could not lift hand or foot to help ourselves. They fell down, it is said, into the midst of the furnace. And often a sort of fainting fit overtakes the saints of God at the beginning of their trouble—the very trouble in which afterwards they can rejoice, for the present fills them with heaviness, and they fall down bound into the midst of the furnace.

Pretty plight to be in! Who does not shudder at it? Certainly none of us would choose it. But we have not the choice, and as we have said with David, “You shalt choose my inheritance for me.” If the Lord determines to choose it for us among the coals of fire, it is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him. Where JEHOVAH places His saints they are safe in reality, although exposed to destruction in appearance. That is the first point then—where God’s people often are.

II. We proceed to the second—WHAT THEY LOSE THERE.

Look at the text, and it will be clear to you that they lost something. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego lost something in the fire—not their turbans, nor their coats, nor their shoes, nor one hair of their heads or beards—no, what then? Why, they lost *their bonds* there. Do observe, “Did not we cast three men *bound* into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men *loose*, walking in the midst of the fire.”

The fire did not hurt them, but it snapped their bonds. Blessed loss this! A true Christian's losses are gains in another shape.

Now, beloved, observe this carefully, that *many of God's servants never know the fullness of spiritual liberty till they are cast into the midst of the furnace*. Many of them are bound and fettered till they get into the flame, and the flame consumes the bonds in which they had been willing to be held captives. Like the pure gold which loses nothing but its dross in the fire. Like the iron which loses nothing but its rust under the file, so is the Christian—he loses what he is glad to lose, and his loss is blessed gain.

Shall I show you some of the bonds which God loosens for His people when they are *in the fire of human hatred*? Sometimes He bursts the cords of fear of man, and desire to please man. Martin Luther, I dare say, like other men, had some respect for his own character, and some reverence for public opinion, and might have been willing to pay some deference to the learning and authority of the age, both of which lent their aid to the ancient system of Rome, but in a happy hour the Pope excommunicated the German troublemaker. All is well for Luther now. His course is clear, and plain before his face! He must henceforth never conciliate or dream of peace. Now his bonds are broken.

He burns the Pope's bull and thunders out, "The Pope of Rome excommunicates Martin Luther, and I, Martin Luther, excommunicate the Pope of Rome. The world hates me, and there is no love lost between us, for I esteem it as much as it esteems me. War to the knife," says he. The man was never clear till the world thrust him out. It is a splendid thing to run the gauntlet of so much contempt, that the soul is hardened to it under a strong consciousness that the right is none the more contemptible because its friend may be despised.

"Why," you say, "is this how I am treated for the statement of truth? I was inclined to conciliate and yield, but after this never! You have loosed my bonds." When man has done his worst, as Nebuchadnezzar did in this case, why then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, could say, "What more could he do? He has thrown us into a fiery furnace heated seven times hotter. He has done his worst, and now what have we to fear?" When persecution rages, it is wonderful what liberty it gives to the child of God. Never a more free tongue than Luther's! Never a braver mouth than that of John Knox! Never bolder speech than that of John Calvin! Never a braver heart than that which throbbed beneath the ribs of Wickliffe! Never a man who could more boldly confront popery than John Bradford or Hugh Latimer! But under God these men owed their liberty of speech and liberty of conscience to the fact that the world thrust them out from all hope of its favor, and so loosed their bonds.

Again, *when Satan puts us in the furnace, he is often the means of breaking bonds*. How many Christians are bound by the bonds of frames and feelings. The bonds of dependence upon something within, instead of resting upon Christ the great Sacrifice? When the devil comes with his sharp temptations, he roars out, "You are no children of God." Why, what then? Why, then we go straight away to Christ to look at and view the flowing of His precious blood, and trust Him just as we did at first.

And now what about frames and feelings? What about emotions within? Why, we are so satisfied with that finished work upon the tree, that we feel the bonds of doubt and fear no more. Now we are free, because we have come to live on Christ, and not on self. Fierce temptations may be like waves that wash the mariner on a rock—they may drive us nearer to Christ. It is an ill wind which blows no one any good. But the worst wind that Satan can send blows the Christian good, because it hurries him nearer to his Lord. Temptation is a great blessing when it loosens our bonds of self-confidence and reliance upon frames and feelings.

As for *the afflictions which God sends, do they not loose our bonds*? Dear brethren, doubts and fears are far more common to us in the midst of work and business than when laid aside by sickness. I do not know how you have found it, but so it is, "When I am weak, then am I strong." Many believers sing most sweetly when providence clips their wings, or puts them in a cage. They are very mute, and their

heart towards the Lord is very heavy till they are involved in trouble, and then their faith revives, their hope returns, their love glows, and they sing God's praises in the fire.

Have not you, dear friends, frequently experienced that trouble cuts the cords which bind us to earth? When the Lord takes away a child, there is one tie less to fasten to the world, and one band more to draw towards heaven. God has loosed you from the bonds of idolatry by removing your darling. You cannot idolize your little one any more, for it is taken away. When money vanishes, and business all goes wrong, we frequent the prayer meeting more, and the closet more, and read the Bible more—we are driven by all tribulation away from earth.

If everything went well with us, we should begin to say, "Soul, take your ease," but when things go amiss with us, then we want to be gone. When the tree shakes, the bird will not stay in the nest, but takes to its wings and mounts. Happy trouble that loosens our care of earth! Give you a few days of sharp pain on a bed of sickness, and you will not love life as much as you now do. You will begin to say, "Let me be gone." Why, even selfishness makes you wish for that. Then you can understand what David meant when he said his heart and his flesh cried out after God. It is hard to make the flesh cry out after God, but if you nip it well, turn the screw a little further, just stretch it on the rack a little more, the dumb earth-born flesh will begin to cry out that it may be away and leave the pain and sickness behind it.

Thus, I think, I have shown you, though very briefly, for time fails us, that the saints lose something in the furnace which they are glad to lose—they are cast in bound, but amid the glowing coals they are set at liberty.

III. In the third place, WHAT SAINTS DO THERE.

"Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire." Walking! See those gardens so delightfully laid out with varying landscape, rippling fountains, blushing flowers, and odoriferous herbs, with quiet arbors every here and there, and soft reclining seats, and there with the voice of glee young men and maidens walk. See that fair prospect!

Turn here—a blazing furnace, so fiercely heated that the eyes feel as if scorched from their sockets as they look upon it, and the fervent heat comes pouring forth as though old Sol had found a house on earth. Yet there are four men walking—walking at their ease. And there is greater joy as they walk among those sulfuric flames, greater mirth in their spirits, than in those young men and maidens who walk among the flowers.

They are walking—it is a symbol of joy, of ease, of peace, of rest—not flitting like unquiet ghosts, as if they were disembodied spirits traversing the flame. But they are walking with real footsteps, treading on hot coals as though they were roses, and smelling the sulfuric flames as though they yielded nothing but aromatic perfume. Enoch "walked with God." It is the Christian's pace, it is his general pace. He does sometimes run, but his general pace is walking with God, walking in the Spirit, and you notice that these good men did not quicken their pace, and they did not slacken it—they continued to walk as they usually did. They had the same holy calm and peace of mind which they enjoyed elsewhere.

Their walking shows not only their liberty, and their ease, and their pleasure and their calm, but it shows their strength. Their sinews were not snapped, they were walking. Sometimes God's people, as Jacob at the brook Jabbok, halt on their thigh. But I think it is only a small trouble for lames believers. A greater trial will set them right again. A stream of trouble may almost overturn a believer, but a flood of trials will make him rise as the ark rose, nearer to heaven. These men had no limping gait, they were walking, walking in the midst of the fire.

Now, for the explanation of all this, turn to the biographies of any of God's saints. There is an old Scotch volume entitled "Naphthali"—it is the lives of those people of God who hazarded their lives unto death in the high places of the field. Now, if you read "Naphthali," you will find that the greatest joy that ever could have been known in this mortal life was enjoyed by Covenanters among the mosses and banks, and on the hillsides of Scotland.

There is another blessed old book, which used to be chained in the churches side by side with the Bible—I mean *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Every family ought to have a copy of it, illustrated with pictures for the children to look at. And if you read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, you will see clearly that there was more joy in old Bonner's coal-hole, and in the Lollard's tower, than palaces kings have known. The martyrs felt a heaven of joy while they were suffering a hell of pain.

One Samuel was kept starving for weeks, having bread and water given him alternately—three or four mouthfuls of bread one day, and no water. And the next day a few spoonfuls of water, and no bread. After he had been a little time in such a state as that, he fell into a perfect Elysium of delight. He thought he heard an angel say to him, “Samuel, you have suffered thus painfully, and fasted, for the sake of your Lord. You shall soon feast with Him above—meanwhile you shall feast with Him below in your soul.” Many and many a child of God has had an experience manifesting as clearly the lovingkindness of the Lord. Yes, they were walking in the midst of the furnace.

See Paul and Silas with their feet in the stocks, and their poor bleeding backs on the hard stone damp floor of the Roman dungeon at Philippi, and yet they sing, and the prisoners hear them. Why, I think I would as soon have been with Paul and Silas, as with Peter when he was on the mountain. At any rate, the three holy children might have said to the fourth, who was their Comforter and Companion, what Peter said to his Lord—“Lord, it is good to be here. Let us build three tabernacles, and dwell under the fiery roof of these boughs of flame. For it is happy to be where You are, though it is in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.”

IV. In the fourth place, WHAT THEY DID NOT LOSE THERE?

The text says, “And they have no hurt.” They did not lose anything there. But we may say of them first, *their bodies were not hurt*. The child of God loses in the furnace nothing of himself that is worth keeping. He does not lose his spiritual life—that is immortal. He does not lose his graces—he gets them refined and multiplied, and the glitter of them is best seen by furnace light. The gifts of God the Holy Ghost to the Christian are not taken away by the fiery hands of flame.

The Christian does not lose *his garments* there. You see their hats, and their shoes, and their coats were not singed, nor was there the smell of fire upon them. And so with the Christian—his garment is the beautiful dress which Christ Himself wrought out in His life, and which He dyed in the purple of His own blood. This is wrapt about the Christian as his imperishable mantle of glory and of beauty.

*“This sacred robe the same endures
When ruined nature sinks in years.
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.”*

As it is not hurt by age, nor moth, nor worm, nor mildew, so neither can it be touched by fire. When the saint shall come up to heaven, wearing Christ's righteousness, and the question is asked, “Who are these?” as the spirits gather around them, there shall be no traces upon them whatever of any of the persecution or suffering through which they have been made to pass.

The Christian never loses a grain of *his treasure* when he passes through the furnace—in fact, to sum up in a word, *he loses nothing*. The empress threatened to banish Chrysostom. “That you cannot do,” he said, “for my country is in every clime.” “But I will take away your goods.” “No,” said he, “that you cannot do, for I am a poor minister of Christ, and I have none.” “Then,” said she, “I will take away your liberty.” “That you cannot do, for iron bars cannot confine a free spirit.” “I will take away your life,” said she. “That you may do,” he said, “in one sense, but I have a life eternal which you cannot touch.” The empress thought she had better leave the man alone—she could do him no harm.

So is it better for the enemy to leave the child of God alone, for he that kicks against God's people, only kicks with naked feet against the pricks. And as the ox smitten with the goad only hurts himself

when he kicks against it, so shall it be with all who touch the saints of the living God. They are not hurt, and they never shall be.

Now, it is hard for some of you to think that this will be the case, but thus it will be with all of you who truly put your trust in Jesus Christ. My brethren, I know you dread that furnace—who would not?—but courage, courage, courage, the Lord who permits that furnace to be heated, will preserve you in it, therefore be not dismayed! You would so wish to live as to have some tale to tell when you shall mount to heaven—you would not be silent there—coming to glory without any adventure to narrate before the throne? Now, you cannot be illustrious without conflict—you cannot be a conqueror without fighting. You cannot by any possibility have anything to witness to the glory of God unless you test and try the promises and the faithfulness of the Most High. And where can you do this except in the furnace of woe? Be of good courage, then.

*“The flames shall not hurt you, I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.”*

V. The last and perhaps the most pleasing part of the text is, WHO WAS WITH THEM IN THE FURNACE?

There was a fourth and He was so bright and glorious, that even the heathen eyes of Nebuchadnezzar could discern a supernatural luster about Him. “The fourth,” he said, “is like the Son of God.” What appearance Christ had put on I cannot tell, which was recognizable by that heathen monarch, but I suppose that He appeared in a degree of that glory in which He showed Himself to His servant John in the Apocalypse, and such was the excessive splendor and brightness, the God-like air that was about Him, the flash of His eye and the splendor of His gait as He walked the fire with the other three, that even Nebuchadnezzar could not help saying He was like the Son of God.

Beloved, you must go into the furnace if you would have the nearest and dearest dealings with Christ Jesus. Whenever the Lord appears, it is to His people when they are in a militant posture. Moses saw God at Horeb, but it was in a burning bush. Joshua saw Him, but it was with a drawn sword in His hand, to show that His people are still a militant people. And here where the saints saw their Savior, it was as Himself being in the furnace. The richest thought that a Christian perhaps can live upon is this—Christ is in the furnace with him.

When you suffer, Christ suffers. No member of the body can be pained without the head enduring its portion. And so you, a member of Christ’s body, in every pain you feel, pains the head, Christ Jesus. As Baxter says, “Christ takes us through no darker rooms than He went through before.” And one could improve upon it and say, “He takes us through no rooms so dark but what He is Himself there in the darkness, and makes that darkness by His presence light, cheering and gladdening our hearts.”

I know that to the worldling this seems a very poor comfort, but then if you have never drunk this wine you cannot judge its flavor. If the King has never taken you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you has never been love, if He has never kissed you with the kisses of His mouth, if He has never said unto you, “I am yours, and you are mine,” why, you cannot be expected to know what you have not experienced.

But he who has once drunk of the well of Bethlehem, would hazard his life that he might get a draught of it again. Would be willing to go through the furnace though it were heated seventy thousand times hotter, that he might be able once more to see that Son of God, the fourth bright One who trod the glowing coals. The presence of Christ is the brightest joy beneath the stars. Oh! Christian, seek it, do not be content without it, and you shall have it.

A very unhappy thought starts up and claims expression before we close our discourse. I do not like to close with it, and yet faithfulness requires me to utter it—what must it be to be cast into that fiery furnace without Christ in it! What must it be to dwell with everlasting burnings! One’s heart beats high at the thought of the three poor men being thrown into that furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, with its flaming

pitch and bitumen reaching upwards its streamers of flame, as though it would set the heavens on a blaze. Yet that fire could not touch the three children—it was not consuming fire.

But my hearers, be warned, there is One who is “a consuming fire,” and once let Him flame forth in anger, and none can deliver you. “Our God,” we are told, “our God is a consuming fire.” The day comes which shall burn as an oven, and the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble, and every soul on earth that believes not in Christ Jesus shall be cast into that furnace of fire—this is the second death.

Beware, you that forget God, lest the eternal fires of Tophet kindle upon you—for their flame searches the joints and marrow, and sets the soul upon a blaze with torment. For you, my hearers, who have often listened to the Gospel, but heard it in vain, *for you* the furnace of divine wrath shall be heated seven times hotter, and you shall fall down bound into the midst of it, never to be loosed. And instead of having Christ then to be with you and to comfort you, you shall see Him sitting on His throne, and His glance of lightning shall perpetually make that flame burn more terrible, and yet more terrible.

If you were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace, it would be all over in a moment, not even your bones would be found, but the soul never dies. The punishment of the wicked is of the same duration as the reward of the righteous. Justice will ever exist in the divine mind, and will ever have objects upon which to display itself. If the soul died, hell would not be hell, for there would then be hope. And so the most terrible element of hopelessness would be removed.

Sinner, dream not of being annihilated, but dread the fire which never can be quenched, the worm which never dies. It is written in God’s Word that He “is able to destroy both body and soul in hell,” a destruction which amounts not to annihilation, a destruction of everything that is true life, but which leaves existence still untouched—

*“What? To be banished for my life,
To linger in eternal pain,
And yet forbid to die—
And yet forever die!”*

Dreadful indeed is such a doom. There is a second death which will pass on all the ungodly, but it is not annihilation. For as death does not annihilate the body so does not the spiritual death annihilate the soul—you shall lose life but never existence. You shall linger in perpetual death.

But there stands the Savior, and as He was with His people in the furnace, so He is near you this day in mercy, to deliver you from your sins. He calls to you to leave your sins, and look to Him, and then you shall never die, and neither upon you shall the flame of wrath kindle because its power was spent on Him, and He felt the furnace of divine wrath, and trod the glowing coals for every soul that believes in Him. God give His blessing for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Daniel 3.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.