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In the Furnace, Daniel 3

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Introduction

- There is tension between Christianity and a religiously pluralistic society. How do we live with that tension?

The Golden Image

- The golden image represents a conflict between Christianity and the religions of the world.
 - Neb's statue is an example of the humanist use of religion to boost the powers of the state.
- **Point:** Courageous faith stands firm in the conflict with the world's religion.
 - Consider the pressures that they had to stand firm against:
 - They experienced the pressure of *authority*. Neb the king enforced the worship.
 - They experienced the pressure from *conformity*.
 - They experienced pressure from *intimidation*.

The Bold Stand

- **Point:** Courageous faith stands upon God's revealed will.
 - The three men refused to comply because they were sure of God's will to not worship any other gods.
 - Their uncertainty was in what God's "conditional will" was for that moment. They were also certain of his ability to save them. He might not rescue them.

However, because they were sure of what they knew his will was they did not worship.

- It's amazing how the three men say "We believe God will save us" and then say "But if not..."
 - It's not a lack of faith to completely trust in God and acknowledge he might have a different plan. Saying that the "if not" is a lack of faith isn't true. Its a faith in your agenda.

The Fourth Man

- Neb notices four things about what he sees in the furnace: there are four men, they are unbound and walking around, they are not hurt, and one of them has the appearance of "a son of the gods."
 - When you love someone you can only be happy if they are happy. If they are suffering then you are suffering.
 - Therefore, when we look at all of the suffering in this world, the only way that we can know that there's a God who loves us is if he suffers too.
 - Otherwise, the horrors of man's inhumanity defeat any other god.
 - "God is Love. That is why he suffers. To love our suffering sinful world is to suffer. God so suffered for the world that he gave up his only Son to suffering. The one who does not see God's suffering does not see his love. [...] So suffering is down at the center of things, deep down where the meaning is. Suffering is the meaning of our world. For Love is the meaning. And Love suffers. The tears of God are the meaning of history." — Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Lament for a Son*.
- Note that the Fourth Man—most likely a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ—doesn't save them from the fires but meets them in it.
- **Point:** Courageous faith is found in the presence of the Fourth Man in the furnace.
 - Keller: "Jesus Christ suffered, not that we might not suffer, but when we suffer, we'd become like him."
- Baldwin: "It is worth noting that they had to endure the ordeal of being thrown into the fire, but nevertheless their lives were spared. There is no suggestion here or

elsewhere in Scripture that the believer will be cushioned against trouble and suffering except by the presence of the Lord with him in it (Isa. 43:2; John 12:26).”

Conclusion

- The true miracle, Keller says like commentators above, is that they stood firm before Neb. Keller closed...
 - “They believed all the way down. That’s faith, and the real miracle happened before they were ever thrown into the fire. They were spiritually fireproofed before they were physically fireproofed. They had been given the faith and the humility to trust God calmly, courageously. Are you closer to Nebuchadnezzar or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Believe it or not, there’s a continuum. You’re not born Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There’s tremendous progress that can be made. This is the faith that can take you into furnaces. This is the faith that can help you face anything.”