

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Daniel 3:16-27 and I Peter 1:6-8 (ASV).

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

And he commanded certain mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their hosen, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: he spake, and said unto his counsellors, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said unto the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spake and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their hosen changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them (Dan. 3:16-27).

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Pet. 1:6-8).

"The trial of your faith." Let us consider four things that are the outcome of the trial.

The Outcome of Trial

(1) The Self-Destruction of the Enemy

How wonderfully above the situation these three men were! With the prospect of the trial, with the threat over their heads, how utterly careless about answering the king! "We have no need to answer thee in this matter." There was a settled confidence of heart, the outcome of an integrity of life and walk before God. Their concern was that they should not in any respect be found in compromise of their relationship to the Most High God. Threaten them with a fiery furnace - they are quite above it all. And the first effect of the bringing of these men into that trial justified their confidence, because the very means that were used of the enemy to compel them into the fire were consumed by the fire. If our lives are in an utter position in relation to the Lord Whom we confess and serve, we have no need to fear the fire. We shall certainly be wise not to invite the fire; but in the course of our life and our testimony, if and as the fire comes we have no need to fear. The very means that the enemy uses to bring about the fiery condition will be consumed. That is a very solemn word for any who would be found creating fiery conditions for the saints. The saints' concern must be their relationship to the Lord.

(2) The Loosing of Bonds Another outcome of the fire is the loosing of bonds. Are you in the fire? Have you got a satisfactory reason for being there? Here is one; it may apply to you; the fire is ordained of God for the very purpose of loosing you from bonds. Yes, the limitations that circumstances and conditions outside of us put upon us, the frustrations of which we are so conscious - they are dealt with in the fire.

But what about the limitations, the bonds, that are peculiarly ours, within us - the bonds of our makeup, the features of our temperaments? The same is true. Here is a loving God ordaining the fire and allowing the enemy to stoke it to a sevenfold heat, with the purpose, in the heart of God, of loosing us from bonds. Oh, is this happening with us? The fires are being heated to an intensity that we never thought possible for us to endure;

are we being liberated by them? Are we coming into the glorious liberty of the children of God? Are we being rid of those things that have so marred our life, our testimony, our ministry?

Maybe you are feeling that you have not got any bonds. Well, some of us have, and some of us are satisfied that this is what God is doing in the fire. There is a loosing in the fire.

(3) Closer Fellowship with the Lord

Another thing that happens in the fire is that these three men are found with One with them in closer fellowship and company than they have ever known before. We know a little about that, do we not? - in the fire, coming to a knowledge of our Lord. We come through the phase of fire and say, 'I would never have known the Lord in this way but for that; it was in the fire that I found Him in these terms. I knew all about the theory of it before, but I got hold of the reality there.' One "like a son of the gods" - so says Nebuchadnezzar in his ignorance - but, as far as we are concerned, it is "the Son of God"; all through the fire, in fellowship with our beloved Lord. Well, the fire is justified.

(4) The Supreme Glory - No Smell of Fire, but Joy Unspeakable

But to me, the crown of this whole matter is what follows after, and it is this that is the real burden on my heart. They came out of the fire, and there was not even the smell of fire upon them. I think that is wonderful. Yes, greater knowledge of the Lord; yes, a liberation and an emancipating; yes, but not even the smell of burning! What is the interpretation of that? Well, I think there is no doubt that one very great effort of the adversary in the fiery furnace - if he cannot stop us getting out and cannot consume us in the fire - is so to leave the marks and smell upon us that for all succeeding days people will associate with us the matter of suffering and trial. You see what that does - it draws attention to us; and the devil does not mind that, because if attention is drawn to us, the Lord is hidden. Having a smell of burning about us means that the suffering and the trial that we have been through have beclouded the glory. To come out of the fiery trial of our faith without the smell of burning means, I think, the fulfilling of that word in Peter - "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet 1:8). That follows this word concerning the fiery trial of our faith - "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Here is the crown of a desperately dark time, of maybe years of suffering, of the testing of our faith - joy beyond speech, full of glory. The enemy ever seeks to rob us of our joy and frustrate the desire of the Lord that we should be radiators of His glory; and by the fiery trial all too often he succeeds.

I recently had occasion to see a brother who before the last war was on the Continent, and he was incarcerated for years in one of the big concentration camps. Without attempting to describe his harrowing experiences in detail, suffice to say that, by reason of the stand he took, at least three times he was trussed head downward over the bough of a tree and thrashed into unconsciousness. I was interested to see him and to note what were the effects of his suffering upon him. That man's faith is undimmed; he has waxed strong; and the outstanding mark is not the suffering - though you can see the traces in his face; the outstanding mark is not the suffering, it is the glory. He is full of joy. Yes, I think he knows something about this "joy unspeakable."

The Need for Watchfulness

Now the enemy is making a very big effort to rob us of our joy. If he cannot keep us in the furnace, he will bring us out so smelling of the fire that everywhere we go people will say, 'Poor So-and-so! He is having a terrible time; I don't know how he goes through; I don't know what he will do.' You see what the smell of fire is doing - it is drawing attention to ourselves.

I have been quite impressed with the amount that there is of joy and gladness relating to the Anointing. We are so familiar with the thought that the Anointing brings power and the exercise of the authority of the Throne, but you know the word in Psalm 45:7 quoted in Hebrews 1:9 - "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Here is the One Who is supremely standing true to God, committed to a way of trial, of suffering, to the fiery furnace; yes, but this One is outstanding in gladness and joy. Again, the Lord takes up the prophecy concerning Himself in Isa. 61, and says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me...." Look at that prophecy, and see the amount of joy and gladness that follows that anointing; for mourning, the oil of joy; for ashes, beauty; for heaviness, praise. Because of the greatness of the pressure and adversity in which you are found, are you in danger of losing your joy? Are you as glad in the Lord now that you are well on the road as you were when you began?

Of course, we can disdainfully attribute the original joy to the superficiality of things at the beginning 'These young believers,' we say, 'do not know what suffering and trial and testing mean. if they did they would not be

"Nor... the Smell of Fire..." (Daniel 3:16-27)

so radiant.' Ah, yes, but have we lost something? Have we 'gone on with the Lord' and lost the joy of the Lord? If we are conscious of having lost something of this, we must take steps to regain it. I was reading of an advertisement that had been put in the paper - "Wanted, Christian - cheerful, if possible." Yes, we smile at that, but evidently the advertiser did not think there was much chance! True Godliness and glumness do not go together. We have got to watch, for the enemy is out to rob us and to keep us with the smell of fire upon us. Oh, that we can come through the darkest experiences and be those who are so full of what we have gained in the fire that the fire takes a secondary place, and all that meet us after the trial find us with "joy unspeakable and full of glory"!

It may be that some to whom these words come do not know what we are talking about, this 'trial of our faith.' All I would say to such is, "Don't worry about that. Just store up the word, because if you are going on with the Lord, if you have any faith to purify, God will purify it, and somehow, some day, by some means, you will find yourself in the fire; you are not going to escape. It is not the experience of some special saints only. The Lord is after the purifying of the faith of all His people, and you will come to the day of the fire. When you do, remember the Lord wants these things to issue from it. Do not be too concerned about the enemy; he is not on top in the matter at all. In his fury and malice and hate he is doing certain things; but God is turning those things to account and using them to perfect that which concerns Him and concerns us, to bring about the end which He desires, even the glory of God in us."

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