

The Refiner's Fire

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Date: 09 November 2014

[0:00] Malachi 3, verse 1-3 It says, And he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

God sits as a refiner and purifier of his people. He's like a refiner's fire. So what does that mean, a refiner's fire? A refiner's fire, it purifies, it refines.

It melts the metal, it separates out the impurities that reduces the value of the metal, and it burns them up. And it leaves behind the silver and the gold, intact and purified, made more precious, more valuable.

And our God is like a refiner's fire. Hebrews 12, verse 29, it says that our God is a consuming fire. And Deuteronomy 4, verse 24, it says, For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

And right through the pages of Scripture we see God is manifested in demonstrations and manifestations of fire and of glory. For example, in Exodus 19, it says that Mount Sinai, that the mountain was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire.

[1:59] And what a picture it would have been. Fire, such a demonstration of God's presence. As we know through the pages of Scripture we see that God's people were led by this pillar of fire and this cloud, as the Lord led them by fire.

And so fire is something that demonstrates God. It's something that God used as a picture, as a manifestation of himself. And our text tells us that he is like a refiner's fire.

So he'll have that cleansing, that purifying work in the hearts of men. A refiner's fire does not destroy. It actually brings out something beautiful, a better quality.

As the fire purges the dross, as it softens the metal and makes it pliable, so that it can form into a vessel that is shaped and useful.

And also the refiner's fire tempers the steel. In other words, that hardened steel that would have been brittle is made strong. It's strengthened.

[3:08] The refiner's fire produces strength. And so it is with the most precious metal that the refiner takes the most pains. Our verse tells us, Now the refiner, he doesn't leave that crucible, but he sits there carefully and watches it.

He tends it. And at the perfect time, he skims the dross, the floating bits of rubbish, and he skims off those things. And then in the purified metal, he sees a beautiful glow, the shining and the reflection of himself.

As he tests the metal and he makes it shine. And so too, our Lord does with us, brothers and sisters, that he sits as a refiner and purifier of silver.

He does that for you and me. Because God wants to purify his people. He wants us to be made right and shining and genuine and faithful before him.

Peter tells us of this process. He speaks of our faith being tested like gold in a furnace. We can read that in 1 Peter 1 verse 7.

[4:24] In the context, Peter writes of a heaviness and of testings. He tells us of faith that is much more precious than gold that is tried with fire.

And so, brother, sister, know this. That your faith may need to go through a testing, trying process. In 1 Peter 1 verse 7 it says, The normal Christian life can mean some testing things.

It doesn't mean when you become a Christian that your life is all going to be easy breezy. But there will be some trials and problems and difficulties, some threats and danger, perhaps persecution, as the early believers had, such as Peter, Paul, John and the others.

Precious metal must be put through that white hot fire so that everything impure is burned away. And only the best remains.

Sometimes gold as a refiner uses the furnace of affliction. These are things we don't often hear about. Or some might think, well, you know, when you become a Christian you get your best life now and everything's suddenly easy for you.

[5:54] No, it's not. It could well be that you will face the furnace of affliction. It doesn't mean that God's left you or that you're out of God's will. You could be in the very centre of His will.

If you're in the furnace today, even now, it could be that you are in the very centre of God's will. In Isaiah 48 verse 10 the Lord says, Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver.

I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. Now it's perhaps easy for me to say this, but some of you might be actually in the furnace of affliction right now.

Perhaps there's things going on in your family, in your own life, but your world's being turned upside down. You're in that furnace of affliction. He says, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. The refiner knows what we need to make that precious metal, as it were, that gold, as it were, of our faith to be made even more precious.

[6:57] And the Christian life can mean those times of testing, of adversity, of trouble, of affliction. And God's refining process, ultimately, it will bring Him glory and it will bring us blessing.

Suffering. Suffering. That's a word you don't often hear at times in some circles. It's as if, you know, it's health, wealth and prosperity. Suffering doesn't feature much.

But suffering can be a part of God's plan. It can be. In 1 Peter 4, verse 12, Peter writes again, he says, Beloved, think it not strange.

Don't think this is unusual. Concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

It goes on, verse 16, Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.

[8:06] I know numbers of us have a burden for praying for the persecuted church. And we see, where is the church most pure? Where is the church most vibrant and alive?

It is in those places where the fires happen, where the fiery trial is going on. And God will allow the fiery trial for you, for me. And it's not something we ought to consider strange or unusual, because God is at work.

He is at work in the fiery trial. That fiery trial may cost you, cost you dearly. It may cost something very dear to you.

But in this time of the fiery trial, know that you can learn to trust God even there. That you can learn to obey and follow Him and glorify Him.

As God builds your character, through that testing, He will strengthen you. Through that pain and hardship and persecution, He will strengthen your resolve and your faith.

[9:09] And in that time, the things that will be burned away will be that which is not needed. So that your life will grow stronger, your faith will grow stronger. The Bible speaks also of God's testing as being like a chastening.

A chastening in Revelation 3 verse 19. Our Lord says, As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Chasten.

You know, chastening speaks of discipline. Just as a father will discipline a child because he loves him and wants to correct the child's wrong actions.

Of course, it's disciplining love. It's discipline with that motive of love. So too God tests us and disciplines us. He chastens us. He corrects us. Why?

Because He loves us. He wants the best for us. He wants to protect, as a father wants to protect his child from harm. So too God sometimes will correct us and chasten us.

[10:10] And the heat of God's refining fire is something that will be good for us. It will cleanse us and we can know and recognize our Lord's working through those times.

Hebrews 12, it says, Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous. Doesn't seem like it's a happy time when you get chastened, when you get disciplined, but grievous. It's something unpleasant. Nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth a peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. You know, while we're going through that chastening, while we're going through that furnace of affliction, it's not always so pleasant. Indeed, it's not. But afterwards, afterwards, it yields a fruit, the fruit of righteousness. God is teaching us and training us just as a loving father or mother will discipline the child that they love. And so friends, when you face such chastening, when you're experiencing trials, it's not a time to complain, but rather to seek him more dearly. He's shaping us into his image.

[11:20] We know it says that for the meantime, we'd be holding as in a glass, as in a kind of murky mirror, his glory. But we've been changed into the same image from glory unto glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. He's changing us from glory to glory to glory. He's making us such that, as it were, as the refiner wants to skim the dross away until that shining reflection of his own face, his own image is seen in the molten metal.

And Paul experienced this testing and sought God. And God said to him, my grace is sufficient for thee.

Why? For my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12, verse 9. So when we're feeling weak, when we're feeling like we're just at the end of our rope, that is when his strength will be made perfect.

In that sense of weakness that we have, through those times of trials, we're being perfected. We can learn to trust. We can learn to lean on him more. So God uses these things.

[12:36] So when adversity comes, when affliction comes, when persecution comes, sickness, suffering, it's all a part of his plan, of his perfect master plan.

In Psalms 66, verse 10, it reads, For thou, O God, hast proved us, thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

God refines his people. We see this as something that's a bit of a common thread. We see right through the scriptures. For example, in Revelation 3, verse 18, the context is our Lord speaking to seven churches.

He speaks to the church at Laodicea. He says, verse 18, It's the gold that's tried in the fire that will shine the brighter.

Gold tried in the fire. The test is necessary. The test is necessary. You cannot refine the metal without some serious heat.

[13:41] We cannot learn to develop that deep trust in God without some of the heat of trouble along the way. Fire will destroy and get rid of the dross and purify the gold.

The gold can take the heat, but the dross cannot. And it's in that kiln that the dross that's proved worthless is detached. And yet the gold more pure and valuable remains.

I know as a young dad in Mount Isa, we were living for a time, a gold mining town, and one of the popular occupations of the tourists and some of the residents, which we were, was to go and watch the pour, they called it.

P-O-U-R. Where the mine had a time where they would pour out this great huge vessel with molten metal and it would splash and make a great big spectacle.

And I just nearly had a video camera at this time and I stood on the bumper bar of my car, it was night time, and, you know, the kind of little truck came out with a great big crucible on the back, a great big bowl that was full of all this molten metal.

[15:01] And I stood on the bumper bar of my car videoing it and zooming in and slowly the bowl started to tilt and tip the molten metal.

Really, it was, what do they call it? It was the dross. Effectively, it was the dross from the mining process. It was the rubbish. And yet it looked like gold to me.

It was brilliant, glowing, shining, you know, really, and you could feel the heat even though we were some couple of hundred metres away. And as they tilted the bowl, it suddenly exploded.

And as I was zoomed in, I thought it was going to land on me. And in fact, I heard stories that when some people go and watch this spectacle, that sometimes, if the metal exploded enough, sometimes it would fall on the roof of your car and make some holes in the roof of your car. And so this was the tremendous hint of this process. And what they were pouring out was the slag, the dross, the rubbish that was left from the firing process.

[16:06] And the gold remained. And, you know, what a picture it is. Somehow, sometimes God has to do things in our lives so that the dross, the rubbish, the garbage that could devalue the metal is taken away so that that gold can shine.

And that's just the same with us, brothers and sisters. And God works this way with his people. We see that right through the scriptures. For example, people like Elijah. Elijah went through the furnace, the fiery trial.

He prayed for a drought and his prayers were answered. And then he had to really trust God and learn the lessons of faith as he trusted God to provide food and shelter. And Elijah learned to depend upon God in that fiery trial, as it were, where he had to trust God as the river dried up. He had to trust God to supply, even through a widow in a pagan land. It seemed crazy that yet God provided in amazing ways as God used Elijah and he obeyed God and received his blessings. We see in the book of Daniel, the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were the pagan names that they were given as they were tested in a fiery furnace. Literally.

[17:22] They stood firm as all the crowd bowed down to the golden idol and King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that they be thrown into the fiery furnace.

Yet they were faithful to the Lord and he showed his power even then as they were thrown into that furnace that was heated seven times hotter than it was before.

They were thrown in that fire and perhaps people might have thought, wow, the Lord's left them. They're out of God's will. Here they are. They're just going to get destroyed.

But no, they were not harmed and they were not alone. They were not alone. When Nebuchadnezzar peered into that burning fiery furnace, he didn't see three Hebrew children. He didn't see three young men. He saw four men 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 Jesus was there.

[18:21] Jesus was there in the midst all along and God has the power to rescue his people. He's the power to hold you even in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. He watches over you and he is close by.

He is with you just as he was with the Hebrew children. Friends, you are precious in his sight and you will emerge from the fire not just unscathed but unbound as these were.

They were thrown in and God just the only things that got burnt were the things that bound them up. And at times in life we can face many trials. We can feel the heat. Our faith will be tested and the intensity can seem so much at times that we feel despairing.

We feel like maybe giving up or giving in because the pressure, the heat. You know, life is too hard. Things are too hard for me. But yet God is doing the work deep within.

We can feel like God has left us but no, he's right there in the fire with us walking in the flames. The refiner is never far from the furnace because he's watching the gold.

[19:29] He's watching the gold. He's waiting for that time to pour off as it were the dross, the slag, the rubbish so that the gold that will shine forth his face, his image will shine even brighter.

It's one day it says in Matthew 13 verse 43 that God's people will shine forth as the sun. If you're experiencing trials and troubles now, it could be preparing you to shine ever brighter.

Ever brighter that your testimony will be brighter. If people see what you've been through, your testimony will be brighter. God's refining work will have done its work. And we can be patient. Learn patience like Job. James 5 11 it says we count them happy which endure. You've heard of the patience of Job. The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.

Job was one who went through the refiner's fire. What did Job face? He lost everything. Everything. He went through the refiner's fire and he testified that he will come forth as gold.

[20:35] In Job 23 verse 10 he testifies but he knows the way that I take. When he have tried me I shall come forth as gold. Job went through much

yet it was the refiner's fire.

He wasn't out of God's will. Job was the most just man on all the earth yet God allowed great tragedy in his life. Didn't mean God had left him.

Not at all. Not at all. He passed through the trials and he came forth as gold. Abraham's another one. Called to that great test of obedience Genesis 22 it says God did tempt Abraham.

He said behold here I am. He said take now thy son thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest and offer him therefore a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I shall tell thee of.

And we know today that it was the same mountain that our Lord. The same mountains one of them was Mount Calvary. And we know that God provided a lamb himself a lamb and likewise God provided for Abraham.

[21:50] He saw that he feared God Abraham passed the test. He went through the refiner's fire and he shone ever brighter. His faith was ever stronger. It was even made him the man that he was.

The fire made him what he was. And that can be for you too. Brother, sister, fellow Christian here today. It's the fire that might make you the Christian that God wants you to be.

Egypt was called a furnace in Deuteronomy 4 verse 20. It was a hot, unwelcome place as that land of slavery was like an iron furnace but God led them out.

Joseph was another one who went through the refiner's fire, sold as a slave, given up for dead, taken far away, cut off from his family, abandoned, falsely accused, thrown into some hellhole of a prison.

It seemed like God had left him yet God was there with him. God brought him through that fiery furnace. Amen. God brought him through all those troubles and Joseph was stronger because of that.

[23:07] Down through the pages of scripture we see this same theme of the refiner's fire. And then even in the pages of history, the record of history, God's people faced the flame, literally.

In 1555, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were about to be burnt at the stake for their faith in Christ. Latimer said to Ridley, Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, play the man, for today we will be a flame that by God's grace will never go out.

These were men of God and women of God too who faced the stake, burnt to death for their faith. A few months earlier, while also being burnt at the stake for faith in Christ, John Bradford said to Jonathan Leaf, Be of good cheer, Master Leaf, we will have a merry supper with the Lord tonight. They saw that that momentary affliction would be just an eye blink in the context of eternity.

And friends, we too, can we have that confidence that our fellow believers have of those fiery ordeals. They knew what was eternal, what counted, they knew what was true and what was not.

[24:26] They were convinced and they would not bow down to the religious system of its day. They wanted to bow down to the living Saviour. And they knew a faith with purity, with integrity to pass the test.

Malachi tells us of the refiner's fire. It speaks of the fullest soap. These are two pictures of a testing, of thoroughness, of severity.

The heat of the refiner's fire, so strong that it would separate the dross from the molten metal. And this strong soap that is spoken of, it speaks of a soap that was very severe and thorough.

and clothes of that time would be beaten on rocks with sticks and the soap applied that would bring a very deep cleansing to the cloth.

And so too with us. Brother, sister, the closer we get to our God, that things will drop off of our lives. The dross, it might be uncomfortable just as it would be for the molten metal, but it is for our good.

[25:40] And so friends, when the heat comes, the discomfort, the adversity, God is doing a work. He's helping you get stronger in your faith. He's helping you to trust Him more.

We will all face the fire. In 1 Corinthians 3, we read that the works of our lives will face the test of fire. Every man's works that we made manifest, they're going to be exposed and revealed.

For the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire. The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. And it says that some work's going to abide.

Some of the ministry, the serving of God will abide if it's done to God's glory and praise. Some will be burnt up where it's seen to be empty and vain.

If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved yet so as by fire. The fire's going to refine.

[26:45] And, brothers and sisters, I urge you today to think as you face your life ahead, there may be a fiery trial. There may be a furnace of affliction for you. Trust His hand.

Trust the refiner. You can trust Him. He has plans for you. He has something that He's making out of you through that time so that you can be more like Him, so you can shine brighter, you can be stronger, purer, more faithful.

It takes faith. When we're in the midst of that fire and you might say, preacher, yeah, it all sounds good in theory. You don't know what's going on for me right now in my shoes.

What's happening in my life, in my family, in my health, in my situation. God knows. God knows what you're going through.

God knows where you're at and He's right there in the fire, right there with you now in your life. God knows what's going on. And gold quality faith is what will emerge out of the fire.

[28:00] Because the heat causes the gold to melt, the impurities separate and are skinned off. 10 carat gold does not have to be hinted as much as 14 carat gold.

24 carat gold undergoes even more intensive refining processes. You know, I don't know whether you've got some gold on your fingers today, but there's a certain carat, there's a certain quality to that gold.

And the higher quality gold has been through the more intensive refining process. And so too with our faith. Don't shy away from that testing time.

The goldsmith is watching over that furnace. And he's careful not to damage that precious metal. He knows how much heat we can take.

And when he can see his reflection in the molten gold, he'll take us out of the heat.

[29:05] And there'll be something precious there. Things will be burnt up, but pure things will remain. God is refining his church.

He wants his church to be ready. The fire is coming to Australia. God's fire is coming to the church. Let's embrace it, not avoid it.

Let's see that fire, as it were, burn off the useless dross, the chaff, the rubbish of our lives, whether it be that preoccupation with worldly things, with false things, with sinful things.

God's fire will purge and purify and make us shine brighter. Sometimes God's got to wake us up. Someone was telling me this morning, God had to get a hold of him by something that wasn't particularly nice.

And that can happen in life. Sometimes he shakes us so he can wake us. And he wants to burn off what hinders us, what's holding us back from walking with him.

[30:12] In Proverbs 17, 3, it says, The fighting pot is for the silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord trieth the hearts. God's doing a heart deep work as he's melting the things away that he wants to remove, that are holding us back, to make us stronger.

James 1, it tells you, count it all joy when you fall into these diverse temptations, these various trials and tests, because the trying of your faith is going to make patience, it's going to produce a perseverance.

And in Isaiah 43, the Lord says, Fear not, I am with thee, I have called thee by name, thou art mine. And when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. And when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.

When thou walkest through the fire, he says, I am with thee. He's with you there, sister, right in the middle of it. Brother, he's making up his jewels, as it were, as Malachi 3.17 says, that in that day when I make up my jewels, there's a sense where it says in Proverbs 25, take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer, or for the silversmith.

[31:41] Take away the dross from the silver, and that will be a vessel as a result. He's making vessels today, and we can know that it's for his glory and praise. Friends, just to recap, our God is a consuming fire.

He's going to consume that which is not good for us. Amen? That which is in the way. And who shall stand when he appears, when the refiner, as it were, comes, when one day he shall sit as a refiner, as a purifier of silver.

He says, the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold. He says, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. He says, think it not strange consuming the fiery trial, which is to try you. Who knows what's going to happen tomorrow? Don't think it's strange. Don't think God's left you. He's right there in your tomorrow. Thou, O Lord, hast proved us, thou hast tried us, as silver is tried, as Elijah was tried, as the three Hebrew children were tried, the fourth man was there. As Job, I shall come forth as gold. As Abraham, as Joseph, were tested. every man's work shall be revealed by fire.

[32:57] I will be with thee when thou walkest through the fire, and there shall come forth a vessel. A vessel. And brothers and sisters, this message is to Christians today.

If you're not a Christian, he's taken the fire for you of God's wrath at the cross. That's where the real heat came. At the cross where he bled and died, rose to life, and he beckons to those who will hear his voice, come to me.

He's the ever-living saviour and he loves you. He cares for you. And he reaches out his nail-scarred hand still to the world and says, come to me.

Know me. Trust me. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you. We can trust you. Even when life's trials abound and it seems so hard, yet Lord, you're with us.

We that trust you, you've not left us, you're right here with us. We pray for every soul. We pray for those that have yet to trust you, that even by simple faith, they might call out on your name and call on your name and be saved.

[34:14] They might just call out, Jesus, Jesus, save me. I trust you. I trust your blood shed for me, unworthy as I am.

My sin, nailed there in your body on the cross, paid for, the penalty of it all. The heat of God's wrath bends it against you instead of me.

We thank you, Lord. And as believers, help us, Lord, to see that chastening at times doesn't mean you've left us, but you're refining us, you're shaping us for your glory, that we be vessels unto honour, that we be containers, as it were, that you fill with yourself and you shine forth from us.

Help us to be Christians who shine, Lord. We pray you'd give us a bit of a buff up, as it were, just to shine us up, Lord, and take away that which dulls our shine, those things that are unworthy of you, that hinder our testimony.

Burn them up, Lord. Burn them up, Lord. Burn up those things that hinder our walk with you. Burn up, Lord, the sin. Burn up that unfaithfulness.

[35:32] Burn up, Lord, those things that are obstacles for our faith. Burn up those cherished idols. That we put our time and effort into. Burn them up, Lord, as we commit ourselves as living sacrifices on the altar, Lord.

We want to be yours. And we want to walk worthy of your name. We pray for every believer here that, Lord, if you're going to turn the heat up on us, we'll still trust you evermore.

And we'll say as Job, I shall come forth as gold. We praise you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.