

Daniel 3:14-30 “Refuge in the Fire”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- ! Throughout this discussion that you experience peace and rest and refuge from the Word of God and from the Spirit of God.
- Recently I was dropping my son off at school and I just watched him walk into school and it was a very average day. You know, I just get out of the car, nothing out of the ordinary was happening.
- I see him get his laptop out of his backpack and then just go in the door. But as I watched him enter this day, I just had this overwhelming feeling of just love.
- It was just, man, I love him. Not because of anything he did, but just because. He's such a gift. And then that same day, I was passing by my wife.
- [1 : 18] She's driving down the road in the opposite direction and we just wave. And she was going about her day and again, nothing extraordinary happening. But I had that same feeling just kind of washed over me.
- And it was this feeling of love. It was just because I love her. Just because she's awesome and she's a gift. And I was just, if I could just have those moments, that feeling and just stay there and that just because love.
- Oh, it's great. There's no performance. There's no requirements. There's just, it's just this feeling of peace and rest and joy and safety. And those moments are gifts.
- Have you ever had a moment like that? Just where you just stop and you just feel something like that. It's just a little gift from God. To me, it's like standing in like a sunbeam on a cold day a little bit.
- And you just get a little bit of warmth just for a minute. You're just, ah, that joy and that love. A few weeks ago, we went for fall break to North Carolina and we went to hike some waterfalls.
- [2 : 27] And those feelings again showed up. And this time though, it was in the presence of God's creation. I've got some pictures here. It's the most beautiful waterfalls.
- And it was just so peaceful and so restful. And it felt safe and it felt settled. And if I could just capture those moments and stay in them forever, it would be amazing.
- What it feels like is refuge. And when I say refuge, what I mean is a place of safety where you feel completely safe from any trouble or any danger where you can just be fully at rest.
- You ever long for that sort of feeling? I know you do. And I do. And I think that we all have that longing because it comes from somewhere that we remember.
- Okay? It's a refuge that's remembered. The garden that we still long for. All right? So that longing for that home and that safety and that peace is not random because we were made for a world that has no fear and no trouble and no danger and no death.

[3 : 53] And if you think back to the Garden of Eden, original creation, Adam and Eve, they're walking with God. And as they lived in harmony with God and his original design for his creation, they were safe.

There's no hiding. There's no threat. There's no hurt. All of their longings, we have these core longings, all of us as human beings.

These longings for safety, for security, for significance, for understanding, for love, for purpose, for belonging.

We have these as human beings. Well, in the Garden of Eden, those were all experienced in complete wholeness and complete fulfillment. And they were met by God himself.

So that's also what we're made for. And those core longings are meant to be met by God himself. And sometimes we get special little glimpses of that on earth, little gifts.

[4 : 55] But it's not necessarily how we feel all the time, is it? On the way to North Carolina, we stopped at a hotel about halfway there. And it was a nice enough hotel, but it felt peaceful.

You know, we're resting, about to go see the waterfalls. It felt peaceful and calm until 4 a.m. And, ar, ar, ar, ar, ar, ar. Warning, warning, fire, fire.

You know, and exit, exit to the, what, I don't even know. I woke up, my wife and my son, there, JP was a trooper. He said, get out, get out the door. He, like, had mom out there on the curb.

I stood there like a day's extra from a low-budget action movie. I was just standing there trying to figure out who I was and what was happening. And it's going, wah, wah, wah.

And by the time I stumbled outside, halfway put together, I think they'd been there probably 10 minutes on the curb. And not only them, but the hotel next door. Everyone is just out. You can imagine wearing their Sunday best.

[5 : 57] And it was a good reminder to me of the brokenness in this world, right? That room felt safe and then suddenly it didn't. And that's how fragile our refuge in this world can seem sometimes.

It highlights that tension in life that we long for this place of safety. But we live in disrupted refuge right now. And refuge, though, is what we're really all longing for.

In everything. And so many times we look for it in experiences. We look for it in moments. We look for it in places or in things that we have.

But I want you to consider this. What if God's telling us through his word today that refuge isn't found in what we experience. Or in a moment we seek out.

Or in a place that we try to escape to. But what if it's who we can trust in every experience. In every moment. And in every place.

[6 : 59] So the book of Daniel opens with a story also of disrupted refuge. And it's in the format of dislocation. Okay? So there's the power-hungry king, Nebuchadnezzar.

And he storms Jerusalem. And he doesn't just take treasure. He takes the future. All of the smartest teenage boys. And among them, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Now they had different names that he changed around. But that's how we refer to them today. He wants them to forget who they were. And he wants them to become who he wants them to be. So he exposes them to new gods.

He puts them in this sort of boot camp to rewire them. And reprogram their thinking. He retrains them. But even, listen to this, kids. Even as teenagers.

They remember who they are. And they make a difference. They don't compromise their faith. And God honors it. He gives wisdom.

- [8 : 02] He gives influence. And to Daniel, he gives the gift to interpret dreams. So then comes this crisis. King Nebuchadnezzar has a nightmare.
- And it really freaks him out. And he says, I've got to know what this means. And he demands that someone come interpret it. He has all these magicians. And nobody can tell him what it means.
- So he issues a death sentence. As any narcissistic king would do. Power-hungry king. If no one can tell me, I'm going to kill everyone. That includes Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- So what do they do? What do these teenagers do? They pray to God. And God blesses Daniel with the interpretation of the dream.
- It's a massive statue. It's made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay. And in the dream, it's shattered by this stone that's not cut by human hands. And then Daniel tells the king, these are the empires of the world, King Nebuchadnezzar.
- [9 : 07] And yours, Babylon, is going to fall. So Nebuchadnezzar stays in this moment of amazement by the power of them to interpret his dream.
- So he promotes the four exiles and he makes them his inner circle. His interpreters for everything. His ancient version of chat GPT.
- Where if Nebuchadnezzar has a question, they have an answer immediately. But by chapter 3, which Alan read for us, Nebuchadnezzar's awe and appreciation for them turns to arrogance.
- And his power shifts him over there. And so what he decides to do is instead of listening that, hey, your kingdom's going to fall. He says, well, you know what? I'm going to actually make a statue and it's going to be made of pure gold.
- And everyone's going to have to worship it. It's a loud defiant statement to say basically to God, my kingdom will not fall. I'll take matters into my own hands.
- [10 : 07] So you can see him thinking this. Well, maybe if I just change the statue and make it all gold, then everything will be okay. Because the dream had gold and bronze and this and that. I'm going to make it all gold. So that's where we jump into that dislocation and that dislocated refuge.
- That disrupted refuge and dislocation of this story. So I'm going to read verses 14 and 15. So Nebuchadnezzar answered and he 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've set up?
- Now, if you're 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've made, well and good. See, this is their second chance.
- All right. Remember earlier they'd been accused of not bowing down. He's like, if you're going to worship, well and good. We won't have a problem here. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into the burning fiery furnace.
- And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands? So let's imagine for a minute. That's a lot of instruments. You would think that somewhere on the internet someone has recreated this sound.
- [11 : 13] Nobody has. I have looked for hours. So this is the best I can do. Okay. Okay. So imagine you're walking about your business and that comes up, right?
- Then wherever you are in the city or whatever, you got to stop and you got to bow down. Right? He's making a statement. It's supposedly like a big symphony around this statue.
- So in that moment, they're being threatened, right? You hear this sound. You bow down. You do that. We don't have a problem. You don't do that. I've got to throw you into the fiery furnace.

The furnace which is most likely used to build the statue and refine the gold. So in that moment, they had that illusion of safety for a bit, but it's gone.

Their refuge is lost. Okay. That sound familiar? We live in a world where refuge is lost, where there's this ache of being dislocated or this dislocated refuge.

[12 : 19] And I think that if we go back to the Garden of Eden, we might find some similarities here. Because they had this ultimate refuge and all they had to do was walk with God and talk with him and trust him.

But then what happened? The serpent comes in. He causes them to question the goodness of God, the trustworthiness of God, to doubt and fear.

All of a sudden, the one that's protecting them. So they disobey God and what do they do? They provide for themselves by taking the fruit, right? Apart from him. And then that sinful disobedience is followed by death and disruption and dislocation.

They get kicked out of the garden. They get kicked out of God's presence. And now we're born into that same world of disruption, separation from God, death, dislocation.

And just like Adam and Eve, we fear a lot of times that we aren't going to find refuge unless we make it ourselves. So we take matters into our own hands.

[13 : 28] So we live in this world that wants Eden, but we try to get it without God. How's that working out for us? Right? And when we do that, our personal pleasure becomes our real goal.

It's a world of pluralism. Let's talk about pluralism for a minute. Okay? You've probably seen this bumper sticker. And I thank God that we live in a culture where we can worship freely.

That rarely demands our worship with the threat of a furnace. Okay? Some places it does, but right here in Huntsville, Alabama, we're not being told, I'm going to burn you if you don't worship and bow it out this way.

But it does, make no mistake, it does still demand our worship. Not with fire, but with applause. With what's trending.

With subtle slogans like, you do you. Live your truth. Believe whatever you want. Just don't push it on anyone else.

[14 : 36] You see, pluralism doesn't usually ask you to reject your God outright. Okay? It asks you to relocate your God. Relocate him to Sunday.

Relocate him to silence. Relocate him to your closet. Relocate him to the safe corners of your personal life. You can worship your God in private. But in public, I will threaten you.

I will exclude you if you make the wrong move. We will pressure you. We will assassinate you. You see, behind the idea of tolerance, the society we live in, is always intolerance.

You have to know that. Because we will be tolerated as long as we don't, as long as I don't make you mad, I don't say the wrong thing.

And it's going to get worse and worse, people. Get ready. Okay? That may be the fire, the bigger fire that we're up against as Christians. But sometimes the pressure is not always loud.

[15 : 46] Sometimes it's just a look in a meeting. Or an unspoken rule at work. Or this tiny lie you say to fit in. Or this casual comment you let slide.

Sometimes it's not these big betrayals, like I'm not worshiping God. It's you're not living the way that you say you believe. These tiny compromises. And you're not necessarily told to bow down, but it feels easier to just blend in than it does to be noticed.

And honestly, that's what Nebuchadnezzar was saying too. Okay? He didn't tell them to abandon their faith. He did not say, do not bow down to your God.

He just said, when this song plays, you bow down to this statue. Okay? He told them to add his God to their Rolodex of faith.

Okay? Believe what you want as long as you bow with everybody else. That's pluralism. Okay? Not the denial of all gods, but the equalization of all gods.

[16 : 48] And this 90-foot statue wasn't just for one deity it's believed. There's a lot of different research on it. But some would say it was King Nebuchadnezzar. I don't think it was.

I think this was a statue that represented Babylon is where everything goes. Okay? And to be a Babylonian, you got to bow to this. You can do your own thing, but you bow to this or you don't fit in.

Okay? It represented every deity. Bow with us. Believe in whatever. Just don't say yours is true for everyone. And yet, what did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do?

Actually, what did they not do? They didn't fight. They didn't yell. They didn't storm out. They didn't even draw attention to themselves in this moment.

They just stood. Quietly, calmly, and courageously. Probably about 18 at this time when this happened. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

[17 : 51] 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.

Notice their faith. Okay? Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fire. He will deliver us out of your hand.

They're saying, live or die, we won't bow down. We don't know how this is going to play out as far as specifics. But we do know that we will not bow. We will not compromise.

We will not hide our faith. And we will not relocate. Because you cannot relocate something that is immovable. Their allegiance to God was anchored.

And that's the power of resurrection faith. We talked about it with Abraham and Isaac. The ability to see past outcomes. Okay?

[18 : 55] It's that deep anchored belief that God is who he says he is no matter what happens. God was their constant shelter. They could see through the threat of fire to the promise of his refuge.

We read about this in Psalm 91. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

That's the faith they have. That's the faith we can have. Right? That's exactly what they believed. We will trust in our refuge no matter what happens here.

God is our fortress. We always dwell in the shelter of the Most High. We abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Our refuge is not lost in this moment, Nebuchadnezzar. It's found. Especially in the fire.

Bring it on. They said it a lot nicer than that. And what happens? Nebuchadnezzar is filled with fury, of course.

[19 : 59] You don't stand up to power. And the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He genuinely liked them. He probably liked what they got him.

But he was pleasant to them until this moment. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it's usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And cast them into the furnace. And we know that they burned up too. It was so hot. They didn't know how the story would end. They just knew who would be with them in it.

And then something happens that no one expects. God doesn't just offer refuge in theory. He steps into the fire. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and he rose up in haste.

And he declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said, But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire.

[21 : 02] They're not hurt. And the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Like a son of the gods. And see, the fire did not destroy them. It revealed something.

That instrument of death becomes this window into heaven for us. And for everyone watching there. A glimpse of heaven. It's called a theophany.

There's an appearance of God in the Old Testament. It's Jesus before we knew he was Jesus. It's the son of God present with his people.

Shielding them. Covering them. Being their refuge and their fortress. This is resurrection before the resurrection. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace.

And he declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high God. Look at that. Now he wants to be associated with the God again. Come out and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

[22 : 07] Imagine that moment. Everyone's watching. All of the high up people. The satraps, the prefects, the governors. And the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men.

The hair of their heads was not singed. Their cloaks were not harmed. And no smell of fire had come upon them. No smell of fire. The fire did not consume them as we sang earlier.

When you walk through the fire, you'll not be burned. The miracle isn't just that they survived though. It's that they walked out whole. Not a hair singed.

Not a cloak scorched. Not even the smell of smoke. So Nebuchadnezzar answered and he said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him.

And set aside the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own god. Therefore I make a decree. Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins.

[23 : 17] For there's no other god who's able to rescue this way. And he still rescues. He still rescues you all. But what about us? What about us right now?

Can we find refuge in our confusing world of pluralism? Yes, we can. In our fires and in our suffering, God gives us the same refuge that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego clung to.

His word, his presence, and his people. He gives us his word. And that points us to where true refuge is found. That's why we read it.

That's why we read the Bible. Okay? If you don't read the Bible, I want to invite you to read the Bible. He gives us the Bible. He gives us community. He gives us community. That's each other. To stand with us in the fire. Notice they weren't alone.

They went in together and they needed each other's faith. And they prayed for each other. He gives us himself. The Holy Spirit. Jesus in us.

[24 : 20] Always. And Jesus is the one like a son of the gods in the fire because he is the son of the living God. He is our Messiah. He entered our fire. He entered our dislocation by leaving his home to come here and die for our sins.

Jesus. And you know what I think Jesus would say? If you are right now able to stand at the foot of the cross and see him bleeding and look him in the eyes. And you say, why are you doing this?

I think he would smile at you and say, because you're worth it. And you might need to hear that today. You're worth it. You're worth it. But he didn't stay dead.

He rose. So that we too can have refuge. Not just later. But right now. Right now in this room. And he has placed us in this new community.

A community of refuge. His body. So we can stand together. We can walk together. And we can be shaped together by his spirit who's with us in this confusing world.

[25 : 22] And when the three came out of the fire, remember they didn't smell like smoke. There's a refuge that's restored. There's going to be a refuge that's forever. That's a glimpse of the new creation.

Okay. The new heavens and the new earth are coming. It's a promise of what's to come to those who put their resurrection faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus never promises to keep us from the fire.

But he always promises to be with us in the fire. And one day he promises that if you look to him with resurrection faith, that deep anchored belief that God is who he says he is no matter what.

That you will be able to also see past the threat of the fire. To the promise of his heavenly refuge. Because he's promised to save you. Second Corinthians says it this way.

We know that if the tent that our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God. A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Friends. So we are always of good courage.

[26 : 28] We know that while we're at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. And he who has prepared us for this very thing is God who has given us what?

The spirit as a guarantee. Okay. That's the confidence that we have, y'all. You know what words Jesus uses to describe the judgment at the end of the world in Matthew 13?

Does anybody know? Fiery furnace. And this passage today shows us a real picture of what happens on the day of judgment for those who look to Jesus as their refuge.

You will not be burned. Isn't that beautiful? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are showing us a picture of Jesus right here and right now.

And you're not going to be burned any more than they were burned if you have your faith in Christ. One day all the fires are going to go cold and the idols are going to fall and God will dwell with his people again.

[27 : 34] But until then, he walks with us right now. Every morning I see a dad on my street. That's not him. That's Al.

That's Al, dad. Walking his little daughter to school. Some days she skips ahead and she's full of energy. Other days she's lagging behind and she's angry. And sometimes she's holding his hand.

Sometimes she's not holding his hand. It's every day. It's like, what's it going to be like? But the dad, he never leaves. He is always right there, steady, walking, watching, protecting.

And I think that's what refuge really looks like for us. I think that's what God promises. That he's with you right now and forever. However, no matter how far ahead you're trying to run or how far behind you may feel, you can stop.

He will come to you, hold you, strengthen you, and walk with you. And here's why that matters. And here's what I think this passage is teaching us. Refuge isn't about where you are.

[28 : 40] It's not about what you have. It's not about all of the things that you think it might be about. It's about who's with you. And if that's true, then Jesus is with you right now if you believe in him.

And I want to take a moment to notice. You can say, well, how do I rest in him? Great question. Great question. I want to walk you through a brief prayer exercise as we end that might be helpful to you in the moments where you feel like the fire is burning.

I want to hold your hand while we go to our refuge right now. Okay, so if you're comfortable, maybe close your eyes. We should go to the Lord in prayer.

Let's take a few deep breaths. Holy Spirit, we invite you right here, right now.

As we breathe, we welcome you. I want you to ask the Spirit to bring to mind right now where the fires are burning in your life.

[29 : 56] Keep breathing deep. What's holding you down? What's hot right now and heavy? Keep breathing.

Listen to these words. Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened. I will give you rest.

Truly my soul finds rest in God. My salvation comes from him. In peace I will lie down and sleep.

For you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. This is what the Lord says. Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it.

And you will find rest for your souls. Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress.

[31 : 03] My God in whom I trust. Whatever fire he's brought to your mind, I want you to think about Jesus right now.

He's standing right there in it with you. What do you feel? What do you see? He says, I love you. There's no performance here.

There's only comfort and there's only rest. His Holy Spirit is holding you right now, right where you are.

Hear him saying, you are mine. You are not alone. I am your refuge.

Holy Spirit, thank you that this is true. Would you please minister to the hearts of those who need you in the fire in only the way that you can, I ask in Jesus' name.

[32 : 08] Amen. You can open your eyes back up. See, refuge is not about where you are. It's about who is with you right now where you are. And Jesus is with you in every moment.

Even the toughest ones holding you, strengthening you, protecting you, forgiving you, loving you. And sometimes we got to close our eyes just to see him.

So wherever you're trying to take control today to create your own safety, apart from him, I want you to know you can stop and you can surrender to him and let him take care of it.

That hotel room in North Carolina, I felt safe until it didn't. But later that week, I got to stand underneath those waterfalls and I felt the warmth and the stillness and the peace and the love and the refuge of God.

And that's what God offers you, church. Refuge, his perfect presence in our disrupted refuge, in the fire, in the peace, in every moment you can go to him.

[33 : 19] And one day, when you step into the new heavens and the new earth, you won't even smell like smoke. You won't even carry a speck of sin and you won't be stepping alone because God has people for you.

Ask him to help you find them. He'll bring them to you to walk with you right where you are. But in the meantime and all the time, he's there first. Refuge isn't about where you are, it's about who is with you.

So let this be the invitation that we close with today. Rest in him and walk with each other. God bless you in the name of Jesus Christ. Father, I pray that you would rest upon this place and that the power of your spirit would be our refuge at all times.

And may we find shelter in the shadow of your wings just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And thank you that you are a God who is near. We give you praise in Christ's holy name.

Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. And thank you.

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