

Where is the Way Out, God?
Daniel 3:13-20

We are in a sermon series “Questioning God in our Trials.” All of us go through trials, and when we go through trials, we often question God. We ask Him, “Why God are you putting me through this?” “Why do I have to struggle like this and go through this pain?”

Sometimes in life we get in situations that are uncomfortable, and we want to get out of them. We ask the question, “Where is the way out, God?”

We are living in some serious times as a country. In our lifetime if it hasn’t already happened to you, you may get into a situation where you will have to stand up for your faith.

In his book *Prepare*, J. Paul Nyquist says:

“For nearly 250 years, Christians in America were able to live in relative freedom from persecution. We escaped because our society historically embraced and promoted Biblical values...Foreign leaders have recognized America’s uniqueness ever since the early years of our nation. Believers in much of the world regularly encounter persecution, prosecution, and execution. The World Evangelical Fellowship estimates 200 million Christians live under a daily threat of imprisonment or torture; twice as many reside where laws discriminate against them. Persecution is the global norm. Americans are the anomaly.

But we’re witnessing an epic change in our culture – a spiritual climate shift threatening to reshape life as we know it. Hostility and intolerance are replacing toleration. Rejection and even hatred are pushing aside acceptance.”¹

Although Christians in America haven’t suffered like Christians in other parts of the world, **the storm is coming**.

Billy Graham said recently,

“Our society is caught up in a powerful windstorm that has already caused massive destruction, with the full impact yet to come...Now, at 91 years of age, I believe the storm clouds are darker than they have ever been. The world has dramatically changed.”²

¹ Nyquist, J. Paul. *Prepare: Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*. Moody Publishers: Chicago, Ill, 2015, p. 14.

² Billy Graham, *Storm Warning: Whether Global Recession, Terrorist Threats, or Devastating Natural Disasters, These Ominous Shadows Must Bring Us Back to the Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), Kindle editions 132 and 141.

Christians and Christian corporations may find themselves in situations where they may be asked to compromise their beliefs. When we get caught in these situations, we ask God, “Where is the way out?”

You may remember the Hobby Lobby Court case in June of 2014. In a 5-4 decision the Supreme Court ruled that leaders of closely held corporations (Hobby Lobby & Conestoga Wood) do indeed have freedom to apply their religious convictions in the way they lead their corporations. In this specific case, the Department of Health and Human Services required employers to provide their female employees with no-cost access to contraception. The Supreme Court ruled that government cannot force such corporations to violate their religious beliefs by purchasing abortion-causing drugs.³

Hobby Lobby stayed true to their convictions, and they won the case. God provided a way out. But what happens when God doesn't provide a way out? What will you do in the face of persecution?

God doesn't always choose to deliver us.

Elane Huguenin of Elane Photography in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was asked by Vanessa Willock to take pictures for her wedding ceremony with another woman. Huguenin politely said she does not photograph these types of weddings, so Willock filed a complaint to the New Mexico Civil Rights Commission, claiming discrimination. The court ruled in Willock's favor and Elane was ordered to pay a large penalty.

The case went to the New Mexico Supreme Court, and with a unanimous verdict, the justices ruled that ‘when Elane Photography refused to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony, it violated the New Mexico Human Rights Act in the same way it had refused to photograph a wedding between people of different races. The court went on to say, “The Huguenins are free to think, to say, to believe, as they wish; they may pray to the God of their choice and follow these commandments in their personal lives, (however) in the smaller, more focused world of the marketplace...the Huguenins have to channel their conduct, not their beliefs, so as to leave space for other Americans who believe something different...(this is) the price of citizenship in our country.”

What the Court said is that Elane Huguenin was free to worship her God in church but not free to express her beliefs in the business she owns.⁴

This is the world we are now living in. The storm is coming. The storm has come, and often times us as Christians may find ourselves in situations where we asked to compromise our beliefs. What about the salesman who is asked by their employer to apply unnecessary fees to make more money, or to lie about a product? What about the teacher who is asked to teach evolution and not creation in her biology class? What

³ Platt, David. *Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Persecution, Abortion, Orphans, Pornography*. Tyndale House Publishers: Carol Stream, Ill, 2015, p. 221.

⁴ Platt, p. 217-220.

about the doctor who is asked to abort a baby when a couple finds out their baby has down syndrome? What about the teenager who finds himself at a party where he is the only one not drinking, and his friends are pressuring him to drink?

What happens when we are caught in these kinds of situations, and God doesn't provide a way out? What will we do?

As Christians we are seeing ourselves beginning to live in a land that is not like the land we once were living. We are close to living as exiles from a foreign land.

In the book of Daniel King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took over the land of God's people. When Nebuchadnezzar took over Jerusalem, he took some of the articles from the temple of God and carried them to the temple of his god in Babylonia where he placed them. He then orders his Chief of Court Officials to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family who showed great skills for every kind of learning and were qualified to serve in the king's palace. These 4 men, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would be well-trained for 3 years. They would learn the language and literature of the Babylonians and would enter the king's service after their training.

In chapter 1, the King had assigned these 4 men a daily amount of food and wine, but Daniel and company would not eat and drink this food because it was either in violation to their dietary laws or this food had been offered to Babylonian idols. So Daniel stood up for his convictions and asked that these 4 men would eat vegetables and drink water instead for 10 days. After the 10 days was up, the Chief of Court Officials would compare them with the other men in training and see who looked healthier and better nourished. Sure enough Daniel and company looked healthier and better nourished, the guard took the choice food away from the King, and God gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. At the end of the time of training, the chief presented these men to Nebuchadnezzar, and the King found no one equal to them, so they entered the King's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them 10 times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom (see Daniel 1).

While they were learning the Babylonian culture, the Chief Official gave them new names to adapt to their culture. When you compare the names that they had under God's nation as opposed to the Babylonian culture, you can see how different these cultures were and how far away from God Babylon was.

Israelite Name

Daniel – “My judge is God”

Hananiah – “Yahweh is gracious”

Mishael – “Who is what God is”

Azariah – “Yahweh has helped”

Babylonian Name

Beltshazzar – “Bel, protect his life”

Shadrach – “I am very fearful of God”

Meshach – “I am of little account”

Abednego – “Servant of the shining one”

As you can see these men were living in a foreign land. They were living in exile, and they were in a country that didn't believe in God or care about God's laws.

In chapter 2, the King had a dream that troubled him, and he wanted someone to interpret his dream. The King wanted his astrologers and wise men to not only interpret the dream, but he wanted them to tell him what he dreamed because he was concerned they would make up an interpretation. Because the men couldn't tell him his dream he ordered them to die. His decree was issued to put wise men to death including Daniel and his friends.

Daniel approaches the king to ask for more time, and then he asks Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to pray that God would reveal them this dream so they wouldn't be executed. During the night God reveals to Daniel what Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, and Daniel told the King his dream and interpreted it for him. As he tells the dream, he gives God the credit not himself. Then the King placed Daniel in a high position and made him ruler over an entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were appointed administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel remained at the royal court.

Now we get to chapter 3. The end of chapter 2 mentioned that Daniel remained at the royal court while his 3 friends were administrators over a province of Babylon. Daniel is not in this scene because he was probably at the royal court.

King Neb made an image of gold, 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, and he asks all of the key advisers, governors, and judges to bow down to this idol at the sound of the music. Whoever does not bow down will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.

When the music started, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold. Every man except for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to make a quick decision: do I risk my life by not bowing down, or do I bow down like everyone else and not risk my life?

They chose to risk their lives by not bowing down. They chose to stay true to their convictions when it wasn't popular. They chose to follow their conscience even to the point of death. They chose to be right with God before being right with men.

AW Tozer said, ***"To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men."***

And that's exactly what happened to these 3 men of God. When they chose to not bow down to this false god, they got in big trouble with men.

When others saw these 3 men not bowing down, the astrologers (Chaldeans) came forward and told the King that these 3 men didn't bow down and worship the image of gold. These Chaldeans finally had their chance to take down these Jews. The Chaldeans didn't like Jews, and these astrologers were probably jealous because the King had appointed them in high positions. These 3 men more than likely took the

positions that these Chaldean astrologers wanted. When they saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not bow down, they immediately took this to the King.

Now we get to our text. Look with me at ***Daniel 3:13-20***.

This is the classic illustration of what civil disobedience is all about. These 3 men of God found themselves living in a country that didn't believe in God or care about God's laws. They were living in a godless land that forced its people to do godless things. And when Christians are asked to do things that go against God's Word, it is our responsibility to choose God's laws before man's laws. When we are asked to do something that goes in contradiction of our Biblical convictions, God's Word trumps any King, Court, or President's word. We choose what God wants every time. We disobey the civil authority before we disobey the Divine Authority. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disobeyed the King's orders it says the king was furious with rage. He quickly summons for them, asks them if what he heard was true, and then gives them a second chance to redeem themselves. Surely, the King must've had a mistake. These men were his top-notch officials who proved to be reliable, hard-working men. I don't want to lose these guys. Let's give it another whirl.

He says in verse 15, "Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

King Nebuchadnezzar was so arrogant to think no one could defeat him, even no god. He mocks the God of Israel by saying, "No god or person can defeat me."

Before a second go around, the 3 men told him:

"O, Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O King that we will not serve your Gods or worship the image of gold you have set up (v. 16-18)."

Nebuchadnezzar was furious, and his attitude changed toward them. No longer was he going to give them a second chance. They offended him in his face, and his shock turned into fury. He was so furious that he had the furnace turned up as hot as it could go. He even called some of his strongest soldiers to tie them up and throw them into the flames.

Image yourself in this situation. What would you have done? What would you do in a situation where you have to go against the crowd because of your convictions?

I'm sure there was so much pressure as everyone around them were giving in to the king's orders. I'm sure the pressure even amplified when they had to face the King himself. I'm sure they were thinking the question, "Where is the way out, God?"

Rodney Stortz said these men could have given 4 different excuses to try and justify themselves for bowing down. Here's what these 3 men could have done.

- 1) They could have said, "It's better to bow down than to die." Some might make a case for situation ethics. In this situation it would be all right to bow down because they would get killed if they did not. Certainly God would not want these 3 young men to die, would He?
- 2) They could have said, "I don't want to ruin my witness." Here they were in a non-Christian culture. God had put them in places of influence. They had worked so hard to be where they were. They were making a huge impact on the society around them. If they don't bow down, they might hurt their witness to all those they are trying to share the good news with.

This is an excuse that we might be tempted to think when we are caught in a difficult dilemma. We want to keep our witness good with those that we pray for and desire to come to know Christ. If we do something they don't like, it could impact our relationship with them forever. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have easily made this excuse, but they didn't.

- 3) They could have said, "God will forgive me even if I bow down." When we're tempted to sin, we may think this same thing. Well, God will forgive me this one time. He knows I love Him, and He must understand the struggle I have with saying no. He will forgive me.
- 4) They could have said, "I'll worship from the inside but will bow down. God knows my heart. He won't be disappointed with me."

All of these excuses could have been given, but they weren't. Instead, these men stayed true to what their heart was telling them, to what God was telling them, to what their conscience and gut was telling them.

These men did not compromise their faith. Biblical faith does not compromise God's laws. **Biblical faith is obedience.**⁵

Why didn't these men compromise their faith? Why were they so confident in God no matter the outcome? Look again at their response in verse 17,

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if He does not,

⁵ Stortz, Rodney. *Daniel: The Triumph of God's Kingdom*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Ill. 2004, p. 52.

we want you to know, O King that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

What are they saying here? They first tell the King that God is able to save them from the blazing furnace.

These men believed that God could do anything at anytime, anywhere no matter what obstacle stood in the way. If God could speak this world into existence, if God could save a man and his family from a worldwide flood, if God could part the Red Sea, if God could make water come from a rock, then surely God could rescue them from a blazing furnace. They knew God was able.

They also had faith that God would deliver them. They had seen God give their friend Daniel a vision to not only know the King's dreams but also to interpret his dreams. They had seen God deliver them from death before, why wouldn't God do it again? They not only knew God was able to rescue them, but they really believed He would rescue them.

They also had in mind that even though God was able to save them from the fire, and they believed He would do it, they also made a commitment to God that even if He didn't rescue them, they would still trust in Him. Although they knew God had the power to save, and they believed He would deliver, they also knew that God was going to do whatever He wanted for His own glory. If God wanted them to die in the furnace, it would be for His glory, and these men were okay with that. They wanted what God wanted and didn't care about the results.

Some of you here today are going through some major health issues. Some of you have family members who are going through major health issues. As elders we pray all the time that God will heal those who are sick, those who are dealing with cancer, those who are facing depression, anxiety, and even chronic pain. There are many of you here today dealing with tough physical, emotional, spiritual, or even mental issues. I'm here to tell you that God is able to heal whatever you have. He is able to deliver you from your illness. If this Jesus can raise again from the dead and ascend into Heaven, don't you think He is able to heal you?

There is great power in the name of Jesus. There is great power in the Holy Spirit. The same power that rose Jesus from the grave lives in us! God can heal in the name of Jesus Christ!

I encourage all of us to look back on times when God provided for you. Do you remember those hard times when God showed up? Don't forgot it! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't.

Some of you know this story, but during my first year of seminary, I was working a part-time job and trying to get another part-time job to pay the bills as I was going through full-time graduate school. I needed \$200 to pay the rent by the next day. I remember

praying this prayer: “God, I know you oftentimes don’t work like this, but it would be nice if I had \$200 in the mailbox when I got home to pay rent. I know You are able to provide for this request. I also know that You may not provide. If you don’t provide, I will still trust in You.” Sure enough I get to my mailbox and there is sitting a card from a friend I knew in College who was thinking of me and sent me a 1 time gift of \$200! These friends never gave a donation to me again, but it was one of the biggest gifts I had ever received! It was a lesson learned in faith.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego also had another lesson learned in faith. As the soldiers took these 3 to the furnace, it was so hot that the flames killed the soldiers, but yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were still alive. This must have been their first sign that God really might rescue them. Then when they fell into the furnace, the King leaped to his feet in amazement and asked, “Weren’t there 3 men thrown in the fire? I see 4 men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the 4th looks like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:24-25). This 4th person scholars say could have been a physical appearance of Christ before His incarnation or an angel. I personally believe it was an angel because in the ancient world the expression “son of the gods” referred to heavenly beings. This story is a great reminder of how God has an angel army watching over us and protecting us whatever we’re going through.

The King ordered them to come out of the fire, and the fire had not harmed their bodies, not one of their hairs was singed, their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them (Daniel 3:27). Then the King made a decree that no one should say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for no other God could save in that way. And the King once again promoted these 3 men now in the province of Babylon.

This is a powerful story of how God provides. He is able, and He provided for these men who had the courage and faith to stand against such great and fierce opposition. God rewarded their faithfulness that day.

Now, God may not answer our prayers like He did mine that Seminary day, and He may not deliver us from our sickness or circumstances like He did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In fact, there will probably be times in your life where He won’t, and sometimes it’s hard for us to understand why He appears silent. But I’m here to tell You, He’s never absent from us.

God may not deliver you from your situation, but He promises to help you through it. He promises that! Listen to these promises from Scripture from God Himself to us, His people:

Deuteronomy 31:6 – “Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Joshua 1:9 – “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Isaiah 41:10 – “So do not fear, for I am with you.”

Isaiah 43:2 – “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”

Matthew 28:20 – “And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

You may not be seeing a lot of hope with your health or with your present situation, but I hope you will see the One Who is right there with you.

In 1963, 19-year-old Brian Sternberg was a nationally acclaimed track star. He held several records in the pole vault competition. He remained undefeated in outdoor competition, and he set his first world record. 3 weeks after he set his world record, he was preparing for the US track team’s tour of Russia, and he landed on his neck while jumping on a trampoline, preparing for this competition.

There was a crack; then all feeling and movement in his arms and legs were gone. Brian would be a quadriplegic and confined in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. A year later when interviewed by Look Magazine he ended the interview by saying,

“Having faith is a necessary step toward one of two things. Being healed is one of them. Peace of mind, if healing does not come, is the other. Either one will suffice.”⁶

At the time Brian believed God could and would heal him. He also believed that if God chose not to heal him that God was sovereign, and this gave him a sense of peace no matter what the outcome.

Well, unfortunately 10 years later, author Philip Yancey went to visit Brian, and Brian had changed. He had been convinced by well-meaning Christians that since God loved him, God wanted him to walk again. They convinced him that if he would just have enough faith, he could stand up and walk away from his wheelchair. Brian changed his mind that faith only meant one option, not two. Only complete healing would suffice. He was putting his faith in faith. As Yancey left Brian, he sensed the mood of ‘an uncompleted, uncomfortable struggle mixed with tough, undying love.’ Brian forgot that God is sovereign, and he lost his peace of mind.⁷

It would be so easy for us to get discouraged, to be angry and disappointed with God for not healing or delivering us from persecution. I urge you to please don’t forget that God is sovereign. Don’t put so much of your faith in faith. Instead, put your faith in God and trust that He is in control. The outcome may not be like you had hoped, but God is with you, and it is the outcome that is a part of His greater plan. We may not understand it, only God can, but that fact that God does understand it, should give us all a sense of peace. God knows what is best for His plan and for His kingdom. In the end no matter what happens, if you believe Jesus is the only way to get to heaven, you will see Him in eternal paradise when you die. And in that paradise, you will no longer be persecuted, you will no longer have cancer, you will no longer have anxiety or depression, but you will have a perfect peace and perfect health and a perfect life as you walk with Him for eternity.

⁶ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When It Hurts?* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1977, p. 104.

⁷ Stortz, p. 49-50.

Instead of asking the question, "Where's the way out, God?" Let's ask the question, "What is your way, God?" Trust that His will be done.

Let's pray.