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The Upside-Down Kingdom: Upside-Down Rescue Daniel 3

Have you ever been in need of rescue? We were just hiking with my parents last week in the Olympic Peninsula. For more than 15 years I haven't been able to go on a hike with anyone in my family without them reminding me that when I was in middle school they had to send out a search party to rescue a friend of mine and me who had gone off hiking on our own. We were naively unaware that we were lost until it was dark. Have you ever been in need of a rescue?

I know you have. I pray through your blue cards every week along with our deacons and other pastors, and we see your need for rescue. We see the cancer, your lost children, your desperate financial situations, and your legal woes. We see you kids' prayers, too. I prayed this week for a child who said, "Thank you for helping Nanna beat cancer and for daddy's new job." I live with you in your need, and my need, to be rescued.

God's word today answers the question, "Is there a god who can rescue me from my trouble? From the things that have power over me? From the evil of the world? Is there a rescuer?" And we learn, as we learn from the rest of Daniel, that our answer comes... and it seems a bit upside-down.

We're studying the book of Daniel together this month. Daniel lived in the 7th Century B.C., a real person, under a real king. What was that King's name? (Nebuchadnezzar.) Before this, when God's people had their own kings, God had warned them that there would be a time when they live with enemy kings because they weren't following and trusting God like they were supposed to. King Neb is one of those enemy kings that God's people were living under, just like God said they would.

We've already met some of God's people who are living in Neb's kingdom. Who is one of God's people who we met last week? Who could interpret dreams? Daniel! God put Daniel in a place where he was the chief advisor to the enemy, King Neb! And Daniel interpreted a message that God sent to King Neb in a dream. What was the dream about? A statue. The statue was broken apart by a single rock, the rock that is Christ. Neb got the message that he doesn't have the power. Instead, who has the power? God has the power.

But in the very next chapter Neb sets up a giant statue anyway and calls everybody who was anybody to bow down and worship this statue, including God's people. But is God okay with us bowing down to statues? No! God won't have us worship anything other than God himself. So the conflict between King Neb and God's people heats up, literally, because the punishment for not worshipping the statue is death by fire.

We've met God's people in this story already. They're Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. What are they going to do? Do you think they're going to worship the statue or be thrown into the fire? The fire! Can God rescue his people from that fire? Well let's see. King Neb is furious that God's people are choosing to disobey him and obey God instead. And that's where I want to start reading today.

From Daniel 3:13...

"Furious with rage, [Neb] summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and [Neb] said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe 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?"

Is there a god who can rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Let's keep reading, verse 16.

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand." [Whenever you see the word deliver, it's the same word for rescue. So let's stick to the word rescue so that we can see if there is a god who can rescue.] So reading verse 17 again, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to rescue us from it, and he will rescue us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

King Neb's question in verse 15 appeared to be a rhetorical one. What god would be able to rescue these men from the powerful hand of King Neb? And God's people answer—first, there is a God. He's the one we serve; second, HE is able to rescue us; and third, He will rescue us from your power. Kids, what is God able to do? Rescue!

But, say Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, even if he doesn't rescue us from this blazing furnace, (right now) we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." God's people do not

make their worship of God conditional based on whether or not God prevents them from going into the fiery furnace. They affirm that God exists, that He can rescue them, that they will be rescued from the power of King Neb, but they acknowledge that it doesn't have to mean that they are spared suffering in order for them to acknowledge that God is true.

But the world wants us to renounce that God is true if we are not spared from suffering. The world wants us to say, **if** God is powerful **then** there will be no suffering. How could a powerful God exist if there is suffering in the world? Isn't that the most troubling question that we ask ourselves and that we are asked? Kids, is it true that God exists even if you find out that a friend is really sick? Is it true that God exists even if your parents say they don't love each other anymore? It is true that God exists! But we struggle with this. We think the good, clear Kingdom answer is that God exists and is powerful, therefore there is no suffering. But we don't belong to that kind of Kingdom! The Kingdom we belong to is Upside-Down! And so that answer is Upside-Down for us! God exists. He is able to rescue. But even if he does not rescue us from trouble, He still exists and is worthy of our worship.

How could that be?? King Neb is as frustrated with this answer as you might be. Because God exists and is in fact able to rescue, we want to see him rescue us from sickness! And from depression! And from global war! Let's keep hearing the story and see how God's Kingdom answers the question, "Is there a god who can rescue me from my trouble?" How does our powerful God go about rescuing his people from Neb's hand? Here comes the moment of rescue.

King Neb is frustrated and furious with the answer that there is a god is more powerful than he is who is able to rescue. So he has people tie up and throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fire. The fire is so hot that it kills the people who threw them in there! Can you imagine? Kids, is fire dangerous? Were these three in danger getting thrown into the fire? (Yes!) But these three don't burn when their handlers are! Let's read beginning with verse 23:

"And these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Neb leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

God rescues Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego within the fire. God doesn't rescue them from the fire, they get thrown in, bound! Instead, God rescues them in the fire! They first experience rescue when the bindings come off! When the ropes are removed! The moment the rescue happens is when they are still in the fire but are now unbound and free to walk around inside an insanely hot fire. Who could have done that? It's that fourth man! Neb describes him as someone who looks "like a son of the gods." He looked like a man, but maybe brighter or more beautiful or

more perfect—something that distinguished him from the other three men. This is an appearance of Christ who is the Son of Man right here in the 7th Century before Jesus was born. And they're just walking around, inside the fire—Jesus and his people! God's people experienced their salvation when their rescuer joined them in their trouble.

We would have thought in a Kingdom right-side-up kind of way that God's people would have been saved if they never had to go near the flames! But that's not the way of God! God's salvation, God's freedom, gets experienced in the flames because that's where God shows up. Is there a god who can rescue me from my trouble? Oh yes. The God who rescues comes to you in your trouble. It seems like an upside-down rescue because God will not necessarily take you out of trouble but will join you in it.

Kids, when did God rescue his people? Does he prevent them from going anywhere near the fire? No. Does he just let them get hurt in the fire? No! Does he join them in the fire? Yes! God can rescue you by coming to be with you where you are right now.

This week I had the opportunity to hear the testimony of one of the mission member projects we support, a pastor named Bandu who leads a church in Sri Lanka. He told me his story of God's Upside-Down rescue. When he first met a follower of Jesus, he was a practicing Buddhist whose extended family used him in witchcraft rituals and worshipped Hindu gods that were statues bolted into the walls of his house. He hesitantly started reading Scripture with this pastor, but his extended family were furious and stopped feeding him and threatened to throw him out of the house. Did God remove him from that house? Put him in a home with followers of Jesus who would keep him safe? No. God kept him there, right in the heat of trouble. And after a few weeks, Bandu experienced God's transformational power. In prayer with the pastor, he experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and was freed from addictions and from the oppression of two decades of witchcraft. When he went home, as he touched the doorknob of the house, he heard a great crash. Remaining outside, he opened the door as his sisters came running into the room. The idols had fallen off the wall, bolts ripped right out of the wall. His sisters acknowledged in that moment that Jesus is more powerful than those gods, and they began walking with Jesus from that point forward.

Jesus met Bandu in the persecution he was experiencing. He wasn't rescued from it, but he was rescued by the power of Jesus within it. And it wasn't the end of the story that Pastor Bandu had himself experienced God's rescue. Pastor Bandu's family met the Rescuer, and then God's rescue extended beyond his family to six churches planted in Sri Lanka and to the thousands of Sri Lankans in Canada following Jesus more deeply at Pastor Bandu's testimony.

And it's not the end of the story that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have experienced God's rescue. The end of the story is that the whole world comes to

know God as the Rescuer when the world sees God with them, with his people, in their trouble.

See, Neb saw God as the fourth man who freed his people by meeting them in the flames. Neb tells the whole world about the Rescuer. He declares to everybody who was anybody gathered there to worship this statue in verse 28, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God... No other god can rescue in this way."

Not only did Neb declare this message on that day, but then he sent a message throughout all the world that you can read in Daniel 4. King Neb started by calling the whole world to bow down and worship his statue. We have the archaeological evidence of this exact message in Daniel 3. This real king thought there was no god who could rescue. But he saw God rescue his people by rescuing them by standing with them in the midst of their suffering. So his message changed to there **is** a rescuer who can deliver us from suffering, and that message went out into all the world.

God fulfills his promise that the whole world will be blessed through the witness of his people. Out of an enemy king's mouth he sends the message, "There is a Rescuer." It looks upside-down, but the message is that our rescuer does not rescue you from your trouble; he comes to you in your trouble. Let's remember that whole story by watching how the Upside-Down Rescue has played out not just in this story of Daniel, but in the whole of the Bible. Let's watch this. [God's Story video: <http://vimeo.com/85213037>]

The way of Jesus our Rescuer, the way of the Kingdom Rescue, is the way of the cross. It's the rescue by way of suffering. It's God choosing to be our Rescuer by entering into our suffering by suffering our punishment for sin on the cross. God continues to rescue us by giving us His Spirit who is present with us in our trouble. And we and the world witness God the Rescuer when he sits next to you in the chemo ward; we and the world witness God the Rescuer when you know God's presence in the fear of the trailer park; our brothers and sisters in Iraq and the world know God the Rescuer when they choose to worship no other God but Jesus.

The first time I was desperate for God's presence was when I was living and studying in Spain. I was in a spiritually dark city and God felt so far away. I got off the light rail at the wrong stop and was lost (again... apparently that's a running theme with my needing rescue.) I was traveling around a mountain and saw the city down below. God gave me this simple assurance, "I am Lord over this city." From that point forward, I knew God's presence was with me even in the moral darkness and loneliness I encountered. The Bible affirms this is true. It's so often when trouble is mentioned that God promises his presence—You know this! "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for... you

are with me!" (Psalm 23); "when you pass through the waters," What? "I will be with you... When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned (Isaiah 43).

Our testimony as God's people is not that God has prevented us from ever getting near a flame. We don't bring anyone closer to Jesus by putting on a happy face, by saying everything's fine when it's not. We show people our Rescuer when we share how we are experiencing Jesus in the midst of our trouble, from the middle of our fire. Tell the world about the Rescuer—the way you have known his presence in trouble.

Do you want to know the Rescuer? Do you know that there is a God who can rescue you from your suffering? Expect him, ask him to be, in your suffering. Ask for the presence of the Rescuer. Expect that God himself being with you will allow you to be free, unbound, to walk out a life with him inside the fire. Jesus will enter into the fire with you. The dangerous, evil, hard places... that's where God has promised his presence to be with you and with me.

Let's put our hope in the Rescuer. We are going to be called out of the fires of this life when Jesus returns. Then the Kingdom we long for, the Kingdom described in Revelation will be fully lived—the Kingdom in which every tear is wiped away and there is no more pain or crying anymore. The Kingdom without suffering is the eternal Kingdom where God's presence is inescapable, where he is enthroned on this earth and everything changes. When we are called out of this life into eternal life with him, we're going to have the same experience as these 3 guys—we'll find that not a hair on our head has been singed. Our clothes have not been burned. And we will not even smell like smoke. Our Rescue is sure and complete.

For now, we live upside-down, experiencing the presence of God within the fire as we long for the day when we are called out. Only our Upside-Down Rescuer—the One who rescued us by way of the cross, who rescues us by entering into suffering with us—only he is able to rescue you. So often, he does not rescue you from your trouble, but he comes to you in your trouble. Let's ask for his presence in the middle of our trouble, ask for him to remove what binds us, tell the world of our rescue, and pray longingly for the hope of our eternal rescue, the day in which we are called out not even smelling like smoke.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. How do you see Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusting in God?
 2. When have you really grown in your faith? When have you known God most closely? Think about that for a moment. Was it a moment of great joy or great trouble?
 3. How have you experienced the presence of God with you in the fires—that is the troubles and the sufferings—of your life?
 4. How does the hope of eternity influence how you are going to walk through the