Heb. 11:32-38; Daniel 3:8-30; The Three Friends in the Fire I. The Challenge to their Faith II. The Statement of their Faith III. The Reward for their Faith

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian life is hard. Our life is not a bed of roses, but rather it is often a trail of tears. Some trials come upon us simply because we live in a fallen world. Other trials come in the form of persecution which we experience because we are followers of Christ. Even as I Peter 4:12 puts it, “do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as through something strange were happening to you.” As you can see, we should not be surprised by suffering or traumatized by trials. These are to be expected! But what consolation do we have? What comfort does out God give to those who fact trials of various kinds? Well, we are also promised His presence through and in the trial! The fact that He is there with is the comforting truth that sustains! So, as we return to Heb. 11:34, we focus on this phrase: by faith, some quenched the power of the fire. As we read in Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were the three men who by faith quenched the power of the fire. Trials teach us to look to the Lord. Fire forces us to look up- and fire purifies our faith! We will see that the same fire that consumes the enemy becomes the instrument of purification! So today we consider this theme: Jesus enables His people to stand firm in the fire as they give a defense for their faith.

**I. The Challenge to their Faith**

In our first point, we consider the challenge that these 3 men face- a direct conflict between the belief system of this world and the faith of their fathers. Remember the context of the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar with the Babylonian war machine has rolled through the land and gathered up many of the capable, royal and gifted young men. These young men were removed from their homes and their heritage- forced to abandon their worship at the temple. They were removed from everything they knew and everyone they loved. In a foreign land where allegiance with the religion of the king was the only way to succeed. So Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego were trained in the ways of Babylon under the greatest king of the strongest empire. Now after Daniel interpreted a dream for Nebuchadnezzar, it seems like the king has grown in his own pride to new heights. Nebuchadnezzar builds a massive golden image of a man, and he sets this image on a pedestal for all to see and to worship. The expectation and demand is clear- worship this image which represents- me or die! Bow down to the religion of man or you forfeit your life. So, everyone does this. Everyone -when they see the golden image and hear the music playing- everyone falls down and worships as 3:7 says. So you have immense pressure on these 3 men. In a foreign land- separated from your family and your home church. Surrounded by the peer pressure of everyone doing what the king commands. Political pressure has been applied- the threat of physical violence is clear in v. 6 and repeated again in v. 15. Fall down and serve this idol or you will be cast into the fiery furnace. Conform to this world- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Worship the idols of society. Perhaps the closest to this situation we see today is when a Christian young person attends a secular college. It may seem like this Chrisitan young person is all alone- that the religion of the campus is idolatry and adultery is unavoidable. Pleasure is the god that man serves. Away from your home and your church- these young people are under intense pressure to conform to this world. Don’t make waves or you will be singled out. Persecution for God’s people remains. Just last week some 70 Christians were beheaded in the Congo for their faith. So these three young men are faced with a choice. Submit or die! After a confrontation in v. 13- and experiencing the rage and anger of the king- these three men are given one more chance! Bow down to my image or you will taste the flame! The furnace will be heated 7 times hotter than normal! So Nebuchadnezzar says in his pride- who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands- v. 15. What God is stronger than me!? Proud and arrogant Nebuchadnezzar is then answered by the three, humble and faithful friends.

**II. The Statement of their Faith**

In response to this coercion and threat, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond to the king in v. 16 with their statement of faith. First there is a declaration of appeal. We have no need to answer you. We stand before God with a clear conscience. When it comes to matters of a faith and religion, we are right with God and He is the judge of all the earth. We must obey God before man. Ultimately, we appeal to Him and not you. Second, they make a statement of God’s power. This statement of faith is clear- our God is able to deliver us out of your hand. We believe in the omnipotence of God- He is able to do immeasurably more than you even think or imagine! You may think that you are the all-powerful king- but there is a ruler who is sovereign over all and you are in His hands! So in faith, these 3 declare the greatness of God. Third, their faith is a humble and submissive faith. V. 17- if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. Notice the submission here- if it be so, our God can save! We know that He is able, but we do not know if it be His will. Fourth, their defense of faith is one that is certain of a future deliverance. V. 17 concludes- and He will deliver us! Regardless of the outcome of this present trail, we are certain that ultimate victory and deliverance from our foes will be secured! So even if our bodies die in this flame, God has not failed us! He will deliver us out of your hands by taking our souls up to be with Him in glory! And the fifth aspect of this faith is a committed obedience. Know this, v. 18 says, no matter what you do to us we will not serve your gods or worship your idols. Like many martyrs who have gone before and who will come after- we will submit our back to the whips, our tongues to gags, our bodies to the flame. Nothing you do to us will convince us to give up our faith! Even if we die for our faith- we will not deny Him who is faithful! So in these few verses, the bold and clear faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shines clear! I know that God will save us in His time! So these men are bold and humble to be sure! They are ready to give a defense for the hope in their heart- and they give that defense with gentleness and respect! Our God has the ability to save- but even if He does not- we will not sin against Him! The fact is, God is not obligated to give us an easy life! This is one of the great lies of our day- that Christians will be prosperous and healthy all their earthly days. Remember that sometimes God does answer our prayers with a “no” or a “not yet”. Trials endure- thorns remain- hardships continue with little relief in sight! In other words, the fires of these trials continue to burn! But even then- while in the fire- by faith we know that God is able and eventually He will save! We do not doubt God’s power or love- but rather we humbly submit! We kiss the hand that disciplines us. Through this trial, our God sustains us- strengthens our faith- and gives us the grace that is sufficient for us in our times of need! So the faith of these three is a clear, bold and submissive faith! If it be God’s will, He can save. If not, I will accept the flame as I look to His hand for grace!

**III. The Reward for their Faith**

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answer the king in v. 18. And the reward for this faithful defense is their immediate execution! The reward for standing up for the truth is that they are bound with ropes and cast into the fire that has been overheated! This is a good reminder- it is our faith that often puts us in the fire. Because we believe, we are persecuted for this faith! The world does not hate their own- rather the world hates those who follow Christ! Because they first hated Christ! But the faith that puts us in the fire is also the faith that sustains us in the fire! By faith, these three men lived and confessed the truth. By faith, they were ready to die- the only thing is- they did not die! As we find in v. 24- they were graciously spared! Remember, these 3 men did not have a special promise of deliverance from the fire. We read of no angelic messenger who promises that the fire will not harm them. And yet, they acted with faith and God in His grace spared them! In fact, the very flames that consumed the soldiers becomes a warm welcome for these friends. Now the manner of deliverance is quite wonderful. The fire has no power over them as v. 27 puts it. Heb. 11 says- by faith they quenched the power of the fire. Literally, the fire was restrained! It had no power over them! No singeing or burning on their body from the hair of their head to the sandals on their feet. They were under the divine protection of God so that they are not hurt at all as v. 24 puts it. Even the ropes that bound them were burnt off- but their own cloths remained untouched. Added to that, they were given a companion in the fire. A friend in the furnace who looks like a son of God as Nebuchadnezzar puts it in v. 28. The angel of the Lord joined these men in the fire to be the personal protector and companion in this time of need. Notice that the Angel of the Lord meets them in the furnace- joins them in the fire. When the fire is the hottest- His presence is all the more seen. Here the Son of God walks among His people. We have this promise- never will He leave us, never will He forsake us! Or as Mt. 18 puts it, where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there He will be with them. In this way, the furnace becomes a church with the Lord in their midst! When the Lord our God is with us; when His Spirit of peace is dwelling in our hearts- we can sing songs while in prison and dance for joy while in the fire! If God is for us, who can be against us! If none and nothing can remove God’s love from us, why would we be afraid! So the application becomes clear- when we are called to walk through trial and stand in the fire, by faith we know that God’s presence will remain and this trial must give way to God’s glory and our good! We can have good and lasting comfort because we know that Jesus will be our comforter- He is with us in the trail- in the storm! His presence remains! We have faith in Him- we believe this!

To conclude, these 3 Hebrew men resolved to obey God and defend their faith no matter the cost! In this particular trail, God delivered them from fire- just as He would deliver the apostles from the prison of despair- and just as He will deliver from the lion’s den next week! By faith, these 3 men were able to stand in the fire without fear. The flames were extinguished- the fire had no power over them. The enemy is restrained and kept in check! As our theme states: Jesus enables His people to stand firm in the fire as they give a defense for their faith. I close with the word of I Peter 1:7- for a little while you are grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – which is more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor. May we all be steadfast in our faith- knowing that our God can and will deliver us from the fire!