THE GOD WHO SAVES E2 | NOVEMBER 22 2026 | JONATHAN SHANKS

Faith and the Fire (Daniel 3)

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Last week, we looked at 11th Hour Faith, when God comes through and saves or provides at the last available opportunity.

We also considered the times when he doesn't answer prayer the way we expected him to, and we used John the Baptist in prison as an example of that.

When God acts in ways we don't understand, we are tempted to ask challenging questions, questions that raise doubts for us, like is he still good when he doesn't answer the way that we expect?

Is he still powerful? Is he still worthy of our worship? We're going to come under an extraordinary story, as I just mentioned, of the God Who Saves today.

The sermon is entitled Faith and the Fire, and it's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

As a side note, when we had our first child, you know, when you, if those of us who've been blessed with kids, you toss around a bunch of names.

And if you're a Christian, you might think, could we go for a biblical name because that's a bit weird.

So when we had our first child, we didn't know it was a boy, but it ended up being a boy, I always said, you know, Shadrach Shanks doesn't sound too bad. We didn't go with Shadrach.

We went with Josiah David, two kings of Israel. You can't go wrong. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood firm against fierce power, a very challenging situation.

They decided to not bow down to a man-made God, an object that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed and demanded people to worship. They decided that they would worship the one living God.

When Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, routed Israel and destroyed Jerusalem, before it happened finally in 586 BC, we understand in history that 609 BC there was the first deportation.

And Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, took some of the best of the young men and took them to indoctrinate them in Babylonian culture and to enculturate them, as Ben talked about a few months ago.

Different overcoming nations had different ways to deal with the people that they took. And so, for Babylon, the plan was to take good people, good young people, and make them Babylonian.

Now, this is where we find the story. All was okay in this process, really, until Nebuchadnezzar creates a statue to be worshipped. It feels like it's probably a picture of him, but we don't know that at all.

We just know that it is very big. Do you know how big? Anyone know how big?

40 cubits. It's about 90 feet. That's about the size of vision apartments.

It's nine stories. So it's not as wide as vision apartments behind us, but it's about as tall. So this is out in the desert on one of the plains.

It's a very big object that the people have been demanded to go and worship.

Have you ever had an opportunity in your life to stand up for your faith, for your morality, and to say, no, I'm not going to do that? You done that? I think lots of us would.

I remember in really, genuinely another lifetime, I was in advertising and marketing, and we had a job of making a soundtrack for a client called... Well, I can't remember what...

If the client was called Casino Royale, I think the client was an RSL, and the space that they did their poker machines was Casino Royale.

Anyway, all I was doing was creating the soundtrack, and we'd had professional voiceover guys in, and the soundtrack would have music, and the music, I was told by my boss, had to be 120 beats per minute.

Do you know why 120 beats per minute would be the rhythm, the tempo? Because it's most hit pop songs, top pop songs are 120 beats per minute. It taps into the 60 beats of the heart rate, and it calms people.

So, I had all the little disco, nice 120 beats per minute songs, and I had recorded these voiceover artists, and they were saying things, and I'm editing it together, and I'm hearing it in the studio, and it's

saying, you're always a winner at Casino Royale. And this music would be playing in the speakers above, the space where the poker machines were, and it was just all sorts of lines like that.

So, a bit of music, a bit of something about the club, and then, you're always a winner at Casino Royale. And I got to a point where I just felt so convicted. I was like, I can't do this.

So, I went to my boss, and I said that.

He knew that I was a Christian, and I said, I just don't feel comfortable, whether I was a Christian or not, to be honest, it wouldn't matter, but I said, I'm not comfortable with this. He was very good.

He just took me off that job. And I know it's safer in Australian culture to be self-deprecating in a story about yourself, but I'm in pretty good light in that one, I suppose.

But I say, by God's grace, by God's grace, that was an opportunity to stand up for what I believed in, and I want to testify I didn't lose my job. God was good. I know many of you have had a similar situation.

These men, they're probably not young now because it's some decades since they were taken. They are not comfortable with doing what the king demanded. Let me finish off what was being read to us.

So we got to verse 15. I've got the text up there. I'm going to just skim down to where Stuart took us to.

I'll read verse 15. When you hear the sound of the instruments, 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 from my hand. That is a very pertinent statement and an awful statement.

One that gives us an insight into the weird state of giddy power that leaders can get to. But he says that what God will be able to rescue you from my human hand.

Well, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego reply 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.

The God Who Saves is able. The God Who Saves is able. It's what the text says.

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us, able. As I said, the narcissistic leader says, who will be able to rescue you from my hand?

It's been said, faith is to trust in something to the degree that you are willing to act upon it as if it were true. What do you reckon? That's an okay little quote, I reckon.

Faith is to trust in something to the degree that you're willing to act upon it as if it were true. The men, they couldn't see this God Yahweh that they believe in.

But they had faith in him to a degree that they were convinced that they should act as though he was there and he cared.

They were convinced that there was a God who loved them and was powerful and would act so they decided to act in accordance with that truth. These men would have heard the stories, wouldn't they?

Of Israel, of Yahweh, the great story, the controlling narrative we looked at last week, that God brought them through the Red Sea. He also gave them victory in the conquest of the land.

So many stories they would have heard and they had, it would seem, developed a mature, developed confidence in the God who is able. God is able, amen?

He's able to do some of the most important things that we ask him to do, like change people's hearts that we love. He is able.

Can I encourage you today, if you're praying for a loved one who needs their heart changed, keep praying because he is able.

In this room, there are plenty of people with testimonies of long-term prayer, tapping, audacious, shameless audacity, saying, God, please do what you are able to do. He is able, but he is not always early, amen?

That's the truth. He is able, our God, but he is not always early. He was able to extinguish the fire, wasn't he?

Of course he could. He could have swallowed up the Babylonian powers with the earth as he did in other places. The God who is able.

But what mattered maybe more to these three men was the second point, the God who saves his worthy. He is able, I knew that, but he also believed he is worthy.

Verse 17 tells us, if we are thrown into the blazing fire, the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and he will deliver 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 gods you have set up. Six words worth committing to memory after today.

Six words that say God is worthy no matter what he does, but even if he does not.

But even if he does not, our God is able to save, but even if he does not quench the fire, protect our skin, prolong our lives, even if he remains silent and moves not, we will still worship him.

This is non-conditional faith. That is robust relational faith. It's easy to bargain with God.

I think it's low-grade humanity in a way, to say to God, if you do this for me, I'll do that for you. Graduate Christianity, sometimes we refer to it in this church, is the first response. Amen?

Graduate Christianity is, though he slay me, yet will I worship him. Job. It's like God is worthy of worship no matter what.

And I would imagine these men, these Israelites, they would have known the history of Babylon. They would have known, they're probably doing history classes, being indoctrinated.

In ancient Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful man in the empire and probably the earth. More than a thousand years earlier, Babylonian laws prescribed execution by burning.

Ancient royal documents even describe people being thrown into ovens and kilns.

In fact, I doubt many people would remember this, but Jeremiah 29 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar was responsible for having two Jewish exiles roasted in the fire.

So these men are familiar, I would suggest, I would imagine, that these are not idle threats. Their response is, the God we serve is able to deliver us, but even if he does not.

Many of us would remember Johnny Erickson Tata. She's a well-known Christian teacher. She's still alive in 1967.

She dived into a body of water that was too shallow, broke her neck. She's been a quadriplegic for over 60 years. And during that time, God has used her tremendously with a powerful Christian ministry.

She's a great example of God saving through the fire, not from the fire, through the fire. We want to be saved from the fire, but sometimes God decides to save us through it.

Johnny Erickson Tata has been given grace to be fruitful in the midst of suffering, not grace to be freed from suffering, the God who is worthy.

I don't know if you would remember, but I wrote a sermon probably a year ago, maybe. We used it on a video not too long ago. It was called Unfinished Faith.

Unfinished Faith. And we explored the idea that many of us have miracles that we're asking God for. And we think if only God gave me that miracle, that answered prayer, everything would be okay.

And I talked about the make-believe, the idea that there was a blind man at this church, blind from birth. And he came forward and the team prayed for him and he saw. Blind, taken away, blindness taken away.

Suddenly he could see, it's front page news. It's just incredible. This man, one of us who was blind, now could see.

And about two months later, he comes to my office and we have a chat about his addiction to lustful images that he didn't know about before.

And it's just the idea that once you get a miracle for yesterday, you need a new one for tomorrow. The point is relationship with God, isn't it?

The miracles we ask for from the God who is able are readily received by God. He loves us to ask for his able power to come and change us. But what he wants most of all for you and I is relationship.

That's why he created us to know him and his son Jesus, so that God's worthiness, his worth is not dependent on our circumstances working out the way we want. Can you say amen?

God is able, God is worthy, and the God who saves is present.

Let me read a larger portion of this wonderful story. Verse 19, then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed.

He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the stronger soldiers in the army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

So these men wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men firmly tied fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, weren't these three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? Or weren't there three men that we tied up?

They replied, certainly, your majesty. Verse 25, 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.

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, come here.

Now, I'm reading fast, but we should stop and just appreciate that moment. You've got a wry smile on your face if you're one of the boys, haven't you? You don't even smell smoky.

They're just loving it. So, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisors crowded around them.

They saw that the fire had not harmed their clothes, nor was a hair of their head singed. Their robes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 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. He does a good summary, doesn't he? Nebuchadnezzar.

Therefore, I decree that the people of any national language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other God

can save in this way. He shoots from the hip, Nebuchadnezzar, doesn't he? Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. What a great story.

Four men walked around in the fire, unbound and unharmed. What a picture of God working in our lives, unbound and unharmed. They found freedom in the fire, not without the fire.

They found the freedom in the fire. That's probably a true truth. God often doesn't take away the fire, but He joins us in it.

Nebuchadnezzar comes around to the truth, no other God can save in this way. The God Who Saves is present. Have you found that in your life?

That when God is with you, it changes everything. This first born son of ours, Josiah, grew up and he got to about one and a bit, and he started moving around a lot.

And one day, in our little apartment in Oleander Parade at Carringbar in the Sutherland Shire, he found himself next to the corner of a kitchen cupboard benchtop. You know, it's quite sharp, that corner.

And he was sort of sitting on his nappy just with the corner there, and he rocked forward and his precious little forehead just spit straight open. And Leanne and I were like, that doesn't look good.

That's our precious little boy. Oh, he's got to go to the hospital, because that's bleeding a lot. Oh, I can see layers there.

That's deep. So we took him to the hospital, and he was the first of all of our kids who have got a scar on his forehead. That is what it is to be a Shanks.

You've got a scar on your forehead somewhere. But my point is we go to Southern Hospital, and we're waiting and waiting, and then my dad turns up. Now, dad wasn't down the road.

He was about an hour and a quarter away at Franks's Forest. But we were pretty stressed, but we just remember, don't we, what it felt like to have dad turn up. And you know what that's like, don't you?

When you're in a really hard place, it's stressful. And someone you love and respect and know well, they turn up into that presence. It changes everything.

And I mention that because that's what God does, and he does it for these men. He turns up in the fire. The God Who Saves is present.

Three men stood before the most powerful man on earth and refused to bow their knee. 500 years later, one man would stand before the most powerful empire the world has ever seen.

And the representative of that, the guy's name was Pilate.

And it was Jesus who stood before him and refused to cut the corner and call down angels from heaven and this guy flaunted his power, like the giddy, narcissistic leader that we found in Nebuchadnezzar.

And they're sort of around the world at the moment. Jesus doesn't cut the corner, but he courageously goes through his calling, amen? Hallelujah.

He goes into the furnace of God's judgment. He goes through the cross, taking our sin. That wrath of God being poured out on him, it really is a picture of that terrible fire of the kiln, of the furnace.

But death could not hold him. Death could not hold this hero. The tomb could not contain him.

Darkness could not hide him. He rose from the grave victorious and makes a way for all who would put their trust in him to do the same, to rise from the grave. The God Who Saves is able, worthy and present.

And this is most fully demonstrated in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is God in human flesh.

Able, worthy, present. I wonder, could we stand, please, as the band comes up to lead us in a time of worship, as response, you might like to be prayed for.

Maybe you are asking a question of the Lord about his ability. Alex and the team, over in that back corner.

And if you would like to sort of move anytime now, or when we sing, just if you want, just go and say could I have prayer? You don't have to tell them what you need, but you might like to.

But that invitation is there if you'd like to be prayed for. But I'd love to pray a blessing on us as a congregation, so maybe we could close our eyes. Lord God, I thank you that you're the God who blesses.

And I speak this trusting that you want to do good in our lives. May you grow in your understanding and experience of the God who saves and is able to make a way for you.

May your knowledge of him and growing relationship with him produce in you deeper faith to believe he is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than all you can ask or imagine. May you know that he is worthy.

May he become more and more the object of your heart's desire to worship the Lord with all that is within you, all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind and all of your strength.

May you sense his presence and know his presence with you in the fire. Be strong and courageous. The Lord your God is with you.

Amen.