

Introduction:

1. Last Sunday, I preached on “What to do when there’s nothing you can do.” I originally put that sermon together to prepare myself mentally and spiritually for my procedure which I had last month. The lesson provided me comfort and strength and I’m glad it did the same for so many who heard it. But after the sermon someone pointed something out to me. As we were discussing the sermon after service, a sister told me I forgot to mention something. She agreed that we need to pray, wait, and remember the promises of God. But then she said, “What if your situation doesn’t change?” You didn’t mention anything about that. That’s a great question. What if your health crisis doesn’t change? What if your marriage doesn’t improve? What if you remain in your storm? Tonight, I want us to examine three different cases of people who were in a position just like this, to assist us in how we should act. Our first case study takes us back to the book of Daniel and the three Hebrew boys.
2. They were in a situation where it certainly appeared that nothing was going to change. In order to understand their situation, we need to know the historical setting of this text. The children of Israel were now in Babylonian captivity and King Nebuchadnezzar was ruling. The King had created this gigantic golden image and demanded everyone to bow down and worship it (Daniel 3:4-6). But these three boys refused to do so (Daniel 3:12-15). As a result, the King directly warned them that if they didn’t obey him they would be killed in the fiery furnace. What would you do in this situation? Some would wither under the pressure of the King and his threats. But this wasn’t the case for these men. Listen to how they responded (Daniel 3:16-18). They knew God was able to deliver them from this terrible situation. They sound a lot like Nehemiah. But that’s not where I want us to focus tonight. While we need to believe in the power of God, tonight we need to be concerned with what they said next (Daniel 3:18). These three boys told the King “But if not...” Even if God decided not to change their situation, they would not budge in their allegiance to Him.
3. What about us? What if God chooses not to deliver us? What if God needs to leave us exactly where we are? Will we be able to say, “But if not?”

The Lesson:

I. The case of the three Hebrew boys (Daniel 3:16-18).

- A. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were faithful no matter what.
 1. The response from these young men is breath taking. They went against what the majority had done (Daniel 3:7).
 2. But they were not willing to lose their integrity and faith with God, just because their situation was about to get hot. Their relationship with God was more than just a “you do this for me or else” type relationship. They were in a covenant relationship with God. In a covenant relationship, the parties don’t react simply because of what the other person may or may not do. They do what they are supposed to do no matter what.
 3. The boys were thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:19-25). When they said “But if not”, they meant it. This terrible situation was not going to change their faithfulness to God. This is what we must understand tonight.
- B. We need to continue to be faithful with God no matter what.
 1. Far too often we can view our relationship with God as “Do this for me, or else.” We attempt to bargain with God, as if we have something that we can give to Him. We confuse our covenant relationship with Him and instead view it as a contract. We can tell ourselves, “Well, he didn’t take me out of this situation the way I wanted, and therefore He has broken His side of the deal. So now I’m going to leave Him.” Can you imagine if God viewed us the same way? We would all be dead, because we often let Him down! Because we are sinners who fall short (Romans 3:23). Yet, God still stands by our side (1 John 1:9-10).
 2. Maybe we need to re-evaluate our relationship with Him. When God doesn’t do what we think He should, is that cause for us to quit on Him? It’s easy to say “I love God” and “praise the Lord” when life is easy.
 - a. If He doesn’t deliver you, will you continue to worship Him (Acts 16:25)?
 - b. If your marriage situation doesn’t change, will you continue to be faithful to the things God wants you to do?
 3. As a result of their faith, these three Hebrews boys were delivered by God. Someone may be thinking right now, “I thought you were going to speak about how we need to respond when we’re not delivered by God?” Brothers and sisters, we must understand that this case provides for us the attitude we are to have, before a crisis situation comes up, and during the situation we may enduring. The attitude of “But if not” I will continue with God.
 4. But we do read about a man who was faced with a situation where God did not change what he was going through. Let’s read about him and see what we can learn.

II. The case of Stephen (Acts 7:59).

- A. Stephen was a good man.
 1. He was a God-fearing Christian with a good reputation, full of faith, and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3-5). He was one of the first deacons in the church in Jerusalem. He did miracles through the laying of the apostles hands (Acts 6:8). He was bold for Jesus Christ (Acts 6:9-10). Because of this, men began to lie about him. But he continued to preach the word with boldness (Acts 7:51-54).

2. But something tragic happened with Stephen. As a result of his actions, the Jews killed him (Acts 7:54-60).
- B. The question for many is “why didn’t God intervene?” This seems unfair for something like this to happen to Stephen.
- C. We must understand that God is always fair even when life isn’t.
 1. The challenge we have is how we view life. We can view our lives like we view a parade. When we are at a parade we can only see what is immediately in front of us. But God views our lives with a panoramic view. He sees the beginning, the middle, and the end. God was fair with Stephen. God recognized Stephen and how he was obedient to Him. Stephen was given a sneak preview of the reward which is waiting for him (Acts 7:55).
 2. Although this seems to be unfair, could it be that there was some kingdom value which came out of Stephen not being taken out of his storm? It was Paul who reminds us in Philippians 1:20 “...glorified in my body, whether by life or by death.” Paul said that he was willing to die for the cause. Even through his death, God could still be exalted. A lot of Christians say that they are willing to die for the cause of Jesus. But are we really? Because of what Paul was going through for Christ, he was able to strengthen other Christians in their dedication to God (Philippians 1:12-14). Our first inclination when we read this is to say how tragic it was for what Stephen endured. But we need to remember that what Stephen was doing was for the sake of the kingdom. Because God is always fair, Stephen was still able to gain something, even when he wasn’t delivered. We need to know even when life is not fair there is something for us to gain through our experiences.
 3. Stephen’s situation didn’t change. Sometimes there will be things that will never change for us. We can’t change who our parents are, who may be giving us heart ache in our lives. We can’t change our genetic makeup which may be causing health issues for us. We can’t change the fact that maybe a loved one died outside of Jesus Christ. You can’t change the fact that you rushed into your marriage and now may be paying for it.
 4. While there may be some things we can’t change, we need to continue to be faithful like Stephen was, and recognize even during the storm that God is always fair and that something good can come from it.

III. The case of Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- A. Paul accepted the fact that God’s grace was sufficient for him.
 1. Paul was being afflicted. Not by God, but by Satan. He said that a “thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me...” Even though Paul had prayed numerous times to God to remove this thorn in the flesh, God chose to leave it. God used this thorn in the flesh to humble Paul. Through this difficult period, Paul would learn and know the power of the grace of Jesus. What did Jesus mean when He told Paul that His grace was sufficient? It’s the idea that Jesus was going to provide for Paul sufficient strength to get him through his problems. He wasn’t going to take Paul’s problems away, but He was going to give Him the strength to be able to bear them.
 2. Maybe with Paul going through this, the kingdom of God would benefit from it. This situation would certainly enable Paul to relate to other Christians suffering through the same situation. He would now be able to say, “I know how you feel.” He accepted God’s grace.
- B. We need to accept that God’s grace is sufficient.
 1. There will be times when our situation will not change. God may not take away our problems like we want Him too. But He will provide for us the strength, comfort, and encouragement we need to get through them. It doesn’t mean God is not able. It doesn’t mean our prayers have not been heard. It doesn’t mean God is not good. It just means that He wants us to know that His grace is sufficient for anything we may come up against.
 2. Sometimes God may leave us in our fiery furnace for the sake of the kingdom. All of us in here have endured various storms. But through the storms we have had to endure, it may be the case that we will be able to assist someone who may be going through the exact same thing. Often it is the case that we tell people when something tragic happens to them, “I know what you are going through.” When in reality, we have no clue what they must be enduring. But if God chooses to leave us in our storms, we can tell the person who is going through the exact same thing, “I know how you feel. Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me to get through this.”
 3. Paul learned to be glad even though the thorn in his flesh never left (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). He kept the attitude of “But if not.” God wants us to do the same.

Conclusion:

1. Remember our Savior Jesus. When He was in the garden, He prayed to God to take the burden He was preparing to face away (Matthew 26:39). Jesus essentially said, “But if not.” Even if I am not delivered, I will do my Father’s will. Was it unfair for Jesus to go through what He did? Yes. Did He endure it because He sinned? No. Was it because God was angry at Him? No. Could God have changed His situation? Yes. But aren’t you glad He didn’t? Yes.
2. Jesus wants you to know that His grace is sufficient for you. Even if you are not delivered, He wants you to stay with Him. And He wants you to know, that even if you stay in your fiery furnace, He will be with you. When King Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace he saw four men (Daniel 3:25). Although these boys were in the furnace they were not alone. Neither are you!