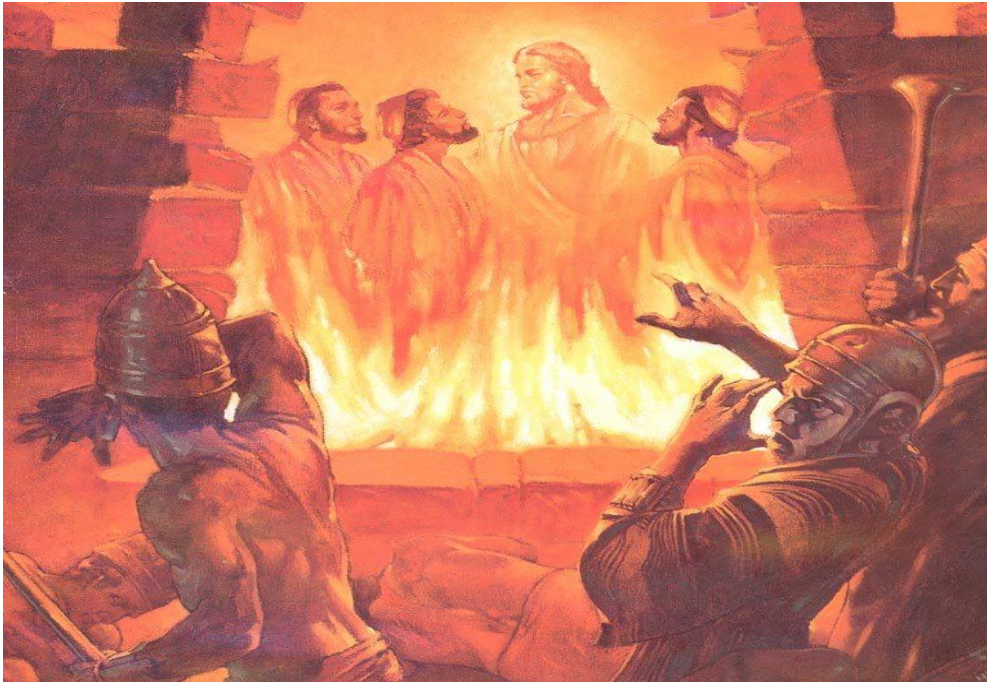


THE FOURTH MAN IN THE 13TH HOUR

By John Gagliardi



We all hear of people saying things like, “God’s never late and never early - He’s always right on time”. Which of course is true – God is eternal and lives outside our human understanding of time, but He always blesses us by turning up exactly where and when we need Him.

But we also often hear people say that God turns up right at the last minute - “eleventh hour” – or even at just one second before the twelfth hour – I guess we’ve all been through things like that at some stage of our lives.

I was talking with a pastor friend of mine recently along those lines and he said he preaches a message that goes one step further – he calls it *God in the Thirteenth Hour!*

Having lived it himself, he told me that he started researching people in the Bible who had come to the “eleventh hour” and even right up to the “twelfth hour” – but in fact God had only moved after the very last minute had passed – what he called “the thirteenth hour”.

In some ways quite a radical message – but not when you start to think of how God dealt with some of the Bible’s great heroes – Joseph in the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul in the New Testament are good examples - both were thrown into prison - God didn’t save them right at the last moment. But it was in jail that He moved on them and brought them out into victory.

Another compelling example is found in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel – Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden idol and demanded that whenever music was played, everyone in the kingdom would bow down and worship the image on pain of death. But three Hebrew youths - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - refused to bow down, and were promptly condemned to be thrown into a “burning, fiery furnace”.

Not content with just refusing, they stood their ground and made this declaration: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter ... our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king - but if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Nebuchadnezzar, hardly known as being tolerant and forgiving, flew into a towering fury and commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal, and that the three Hebrews be bound and flung headlong into the blast furnace, which was so hot it incinerated the soldiers who had thrown them in.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not saved from being thrown into the furnace at the last possible moment – at the eleventh hour or even at just one second before midnight – in they went, bound hand and foot, right into the midst of the "burning, fiery furnace".

Let King Nebuchadnezzar himself continue the story: "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Look! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the form of one of them is like the Son of God."

The story continues that, not only were the three Hebrews not hurt, but – in the words of the Scripture – "...They saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed, nor were their garments affected, and the smell of the fire was not on them."

Confronted by this astounding proof of God's power, the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar was forced to blurt out: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him". What a staggering utterance from one of the most infamous and cruel pagan kings in the entire annals of Biblical history!

As Jentezen Franklin says in his 2009 book *Fear Fighters*, "Instead of talking fear, start declaring that the same Jesus who was with the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace is with you. When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace and said, 'I see four men ... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God', I would like to correct him: "Mr. Nebuchadnezzar, He is not *like* the Son of God; He *is* the Son of God, and He is with me in my fiery furnace! He has all power!"

Henry Blackaby, in his devotional *Experiencing God Day by Day*, has this to say: "Sometimes the greatest act of faith is *not* to ask for a miracle. One of the most amazing statements of faith in the Old Testament came from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as they faced the fiery furnace because of their obedience to God.

"They expressed their faith when they assured King Nebuchadnezzar: 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us ... and He will deliver us from your hand, O king; but if not ... we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image...' (Daniel 3:17-19).

"They were confident in God's ability to deliver them, but they trusted Him so completely that they did not ask to be spared. Does your faith need miracles to sustain it? Or do you trust God so totally that you can say, 'But if not, I will still trust the Lord'."

The level of faith Henry Blackaby is talking about is truly the faith that moves mountains (Matthew 17:14-21), that pleases God (Hebrews 11: 6), and that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4 and 5). It is the sort of faith that says, "There is no way out in the natural, but God has made precious and eternal promises, and I trust those promises right into that 'thirteenth hour'."

Whenever I think or talk about faith, I am always irresistibly drawn to Job, the "poster boy" for supernatural patience and faith. In his situation at the time, having lost his wealth, health and family, it was probably not an unreasonable suggestion – if literally diabolical – from his wife to "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Plenty of people in today's violence and death-obsessed culture think suicide is a perfectly reasonable response when things don't seem to go as they should and, if anyone should doubt this, look at some of the horrific statistics on teen suicide alone.

But Job's response was to refuse to "sin with his lips", but instead asked: "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2: 10). Job trusted God, and even went so far as to say in another place, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Oswald Chambers has described these nine words as "the most sublime utterance of faith in the whole of the Bible".

Of course we all know how it ended for Job – everything was restored to him, and he finished up with twice as much as he'd had before (Job 42:10-12). But remember – when Job made his famous "though He slay me" utterance, he had no knowledge or assurance in the natural of how things would end up for him, all he had was his trust and faith that God would make all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called to His purpose (Romans 8: 28).

Our circumstances – even if they can seem just as painful sometimes as Nebuchadnezzar's "burning, fiery furnace" - are both temporal and "seen". But remember that God commands us in His Word to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The furnace might feel hot – it is undoubtedly scary – but we must always keep in mind that there is that all-important Fourth Man – the Son of God – walking around in the furnace with us, who ultimately leads us out of the fire, unsinged and not even smelling of the experience!

One of Oral Roberts' most memorable sermons, published and quoted in innumerable books and articles, was entitled *The Fourth Man* (some excerpts): "When the soldiers threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace, **the Fourth Man** hurled Himself through space and in a moment's time was beside them, going into the burning fiery furnace with them;

*"By the time the door was shut, He had ripped off their bonds and clothed them with Divine Protection. When the king looked in, all four of them were walking around in the fire, unhurt and untouched by the flames. The form of **the Fourth Man** was like the Son of God!*

*"**Who is this Fourth Man?** ...He is a Father to the orphan, Husband to the widow, to the traveler in the night He is the Bright and Morning Star; to those who walk in the lonesome valley He is the Lily of the Valley, the Rose of Sharon, the Honey in the Rock.*

*"**Who is this Fourth Man?** He is the Brightness of God's Glory, the Express image of His Person, the King of Glory, the Pearl of Great Price, the Rock in a weary land, the Cup that runneth over, the Rod and Staff that comfort. And the Government of our lives is upon His shoulders.*

*“Who is **this Fourth Man**? He is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Living God! My Saviour! My Companion! My Lord and my King!”*