

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #8

The Refiner's Fire

Review

I. Introduction

This is the 8th message in our series on “The Purpose of Testing”.
That God has a purpose for every test, trial or trouble He allows in our lives.

Our title tonight, is “The Refiner’s Fire”, taken from a text in the last book of the Old Testament, where God spoke to the Prophet Malachi of the 1st coming of Christ.

Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

This sounds like good news. The Jews had been waiting on the Messiah for centuries; then we read the next 2 verses...

Malachi 3:2-3

"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness."

Fast forward 400 years to the ministry of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for the earthly ministry of Jesus...

Luke 3:16-17

But One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

In both cases, the ministry of the Messiah was connected with “fire”!

A. The 2 Functions of Fire in the Bible

1. Fire has 2 functions in the Bible; positive and negative:

a. Negatively, it represents judgment: God punishes by fire.

- God sent fire from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah
- He rained hail and fire down upon Egypt
- Those who reject God will suffer in eternal fire

2. But there is a positive function of fire: the same God Who uses fire to punish the sinner will use fire to purify the saints.

“purify”

**To make pure; to free from undesirable elements
Spiritually, to sanctify or make holy**

3. The metaphor is a bar of precious metal but full of a mixture with alloys and worthless metals; the only way to separate the precious from the vile is fire.

a. This principle is presented in what God said to Isaiah:

Isaiah 48:10

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

Then he adds...

Isaiah 48:10-11

For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it.

4. The fiery furnace of affliction is God's idea, not ours; we would avoid the fire if we could; but one of the old Puritans wrote about the “necessity” of the fire:

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It would seem to be a great hardship to a lump of iron ore, if it were conscious, that it should have to be melted, separated from its accretions, beaten together into a bar of pure metal, then heated again and cooled suddenly, exposed in this way in quick succession to the most rapid and

intense changes of temperature, and hammered furiously while these terrible processes are going on.

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It might say, "Why cannot I be left in peace in my condition as ore? I am content with this form of life." Yet it is only by such processes that it can be promoted in quality from the sluggish state of raw metal compounded with alloy, into steel.

5. The only way to bring forth pure gold is by applying enough heat to separate it from its mixture; and that applies to us.

Albert Barnes

“Wonderful is the separation of the pure metal from the dross with which it has mingled; yet more wonderful is the divine discipline which purifies the good that lies hidden like a grain of gold, even in rough and common natures, and frees it from all admixture of evil.”

6. Solomon said it this way:

Proverbs 17:3

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts.

a. A teacher gives a student in the school of the world a test to find out what's in their heads; but God gives students in the school of Christ a test to find out what's in our hearts.

b. The difference is that *God already knows* what's in our hearts; but *we don't really know* what's in our hearts until we go through the fire.

7. Many in the Bible had to face a fiery furnace of testing and trial before they finished their course.

B. Passing The Test of the Refiner's Fire

1. Abraham is a great example of the principle of: Promise-Problem-Provision.

a. God promised him a son when he was 75 years old. But it was 25 years before the provision (Isaac was born).

- b. Besides his age, the biggest problem was DELAY.
- c. But biggest test came later.

Genesis 22:1-2

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

d. Waiting was a trial; but this was a fiery trial; one of the greatest in the Bible; when God asks you to lay the most important thing in your life on the altar!

e. Is there one big thing in your life God is calling you to lay down?

2. Once again consider the case of Joseph: betrayed by his brothers; imprisoned for 13 years on false charges; a fiery trial!

Psalm 105:17-19

Joseph was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters; he was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.

a. Joseph was training for reigning; but God would not permit his promotion until he had passed his test:

- He had to hold on to his dream; the Word God had given him
- He had to learn how to forgive those who had hurt him

b. I wonder if you are suffering today because of how someone sinned against you; do you not know you'll stay in the prison until you fully forgive them?

c. Perhaps your prison is just a "Divine detour"; a fiery trial for burning up your unforgiveness?

3. And I could give other examples of those who came through the refiner's fire in victory. But there are those who failed their test.

C. Failing in the Refiner's Fire

1. Moses:

- The patience of Moses was tested by a backslidden nation in the wilderness; lost his temper and God denied him access to the Promised Land; your fiery trial may come in the form of dealing with people in your life who make you mad

Deuteronomy 4:21

Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance

2. David:

- The great King David passed many fiery public tests of his faith; but after all his victories, he failed the fiery private test of his faith when he was overcome by lust, committing adultery and a murder to cover it up. This is a word of warning to us who are leaders; our fiery trial may come not in our poverty but in our prosperity; we may defeat all our enemies without and fall to an enemy within, (within our own hearts).

1 Kings 15:5-6

David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

3. Moses and David teach us that we can fail a fiery trial and still go to heaven; but their lives are Old Testament lessons for us.

4. The New Testament example that comes to mind is Simon Peter, one of the most prominent of all the Apostles.

D. Peter Fails a Test

1. Remember the greatness of this man:

- a. One of the original 12
- b. One of the 3 disciples closest to Jesus.
- c. The 1st of the 12 to recognize the true identity of Jesus
- d. He walked on water and did many miracles
- e. But he failed a fiery trial when Jesus went to the cross:

Matthew 26:31-32

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

2. Here Jesus is saying, "Tonight you will go through a fiery trial and you will fail; but I will see you again after the resurrection. But..."

Matthew 26:33-35

**Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."
35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"
And so said all the disciples.**

3. Peter is a perfect picture of how spiritual pride can work its way into even the best of saints. He obviously sees himself as more mature than the other brothers.

4. The Bible gives many warnings about the sin of pride:

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Wherefore let him that think he stands take heed lest he fall.

a. This is special danger for us if we see ourselves as knowing more than those around us.

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

5. Peter was puffed up and his balloon was about to bust in the fiery trial which will come to many of us: to stand up for Jesus when it might cost us everything to do so.

Matthew 26:73-75

And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed.

And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

6. The Bible is brutal about telling the truth; it tells of Peter's failures as well as his feats; he failed under fire; he failed the test. But he learned from it!

E. Peter Preached on Fiery Trials

1. All the New Testament writers speak to us about troubles and trials; but Peter is the only one who writes to us about "*fiery trials*".

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

a. Peter says to see the "fiery trial" as preparing us for glory; a cause for rejoicing; something he said just earlier...

1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...

2. Notice that he speaks of how the fire tests the genuineness of our faith, which is more precious than gold.

Adrian Rogers

"A faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted."

a. Saul suited up David in the King's armor to fight the giant, but...

1 Samuel 17:9

And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off.

b. Only genuine faith can stand the fire of testing and be trusted.

3. The vast majority in our nation claim to be Christian; but counterfeit Christianity can easily hide in a comfortable culture like America. I wonder how we would do if our faith was truly tested. This was written 200 years ago...

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Many Christians are dull, and stupid, and useless, because they have not had disaster enough to wake them up. The brightest scarf that heaven makes is thrown over the shoulders of the storm. You cannot make a thorough Christian life out of sunshine alone. There are some very dark hues in the ribbon of the rainbow.”

4. The great Charles Spurgeon described those who could walk with Jesus in silver slippers but not with bare and bloody feet to the Cross. He once said this:

Charles Spurgeon

“Oh, man, if you be a child of God you are like a house which He is building with gold, and silver, and precious stones; but by reason of your old nature you are mixing up the Divine material with much of your own wood, and hay, and stubble. Therefore the fire comes to rage around you to burn out this injurious stuff which is marring the whole fabric.”

5. Few men went through fiery trials like Job; but in the midst of his trial...

Job 23:10

God knows the way I take; and when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

III. Close: **Steve Green Song:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZtgJKJCqXM>

A. The Sum of What We Have Said

1. God has a purpose for any fiery trials He allows in our lives:

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God's fires are hot, but they are purifying. He Himself is "a consuming fire" but only to what is evil: He is a purifying and preserving fire to all that is good.

2. God is making an Israel out of a Jacob; and He will preserve us in the process.

Isaiah 43:1-3

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior..."

Closing Prayer

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