

## The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour

I've never liked to begin telling a story before I know the ending. How can I shape a tale without knowing which direction it will take? Yet here I am, stuck in the waiting, in the rising action of the story, just before the climax that I'm afraid to witness. I could wait to write to see how the story unfolds, but now is when I need the words: the reminder that God is still in control.

I need the reminder that God moves at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, that Jesus is with me in the rising action of worldly circumstances that drag my heart behind against my will. *How can this be happening?* I find myself thinking. *How on earth did I get here? How do I get out?*

The reality pours over me like Autumn rain: Maybe there is no getting *out*. Maybe there is only getting *through*. My brain recognizes this truth even as my heart struggles with it.

Our God is faithful, but I must accept that He doesn't always move in the same way or in the same time frame that I would. The Bible gives us numerous examples. Daniel was faithful, but he was still thrown into the lion's den. The Lord didn't save Daniel from experiencing this horrible scenario.

Daniel went through all of the things the chapter doesn't mention, so he had to come to terms with the truth that those whom he never hurt wanted him dead. Perhaps he watched the sunset for what he believed would be the last time as he reflected on his life. Perhaps he even said goodbye to his friends. This was truly a terrible situation.

When the administrators told King Darius that the law required Daniel's death, the king tried to intercede. *"When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him"* (Daniel 6:14).

I can relate to King Darius. Many times, I've retraced my options to see if something might change my circumstances. I try to save myself from pain. I try to save the ones I love from suffering. I try to find a way out at the 10<sup>th</sup> hour before things get worse.

Yet, had King Darius succeeded in saving Daniel, would the story be as wonderful? Would we know about Daniel? Would we retell the story? The King would have received the praise, and the story would have been over. Instead, the rescue comes later, and it comes from God.

God didn't prevent the experiences the pit or all that led up to it; Daniel faced the punishment, the lions, and his imminent death. But God had a larger plan. He sent an angel into the pit *with* Daniel. God closed the mouths of the hungry beasts. Daniel survived, testified, and changed the kingdom (Daniel 6).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obeyed the Father, yet they didn't escape the horror of being thrown into the fire. For the story to become amazing, the flames had to be more than a threat: they had to be a reality – the reality for three faithful, innocent Hebrews. God didn't save the three friends from having to walk into the furnace; He sent help into the flames *with* them, and they made it through (Daniel 3).

David had to face the giant who wanted him dead before the Lord stepped in. Jesus had to face the cross before He won the victory; indeed, the cross *WAS* the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57).

None of them made it *out*, but all of them made it *through*. I know it's true, yet here I am, at hour 10, telling God I don't want to face the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. I don't want to see the lions or the flames. I don't want to face the ones who seek to destroy me. I want a 10<sup>th</sup>-hour rescue. *I want victory now.*

God is a God of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Would there even be a story to tell if God moved *before* the trials? If He intervened before the world tried to break us, would we even notice His power?

Jesus told His disciples, *"take up your cross and follow Me."* (Luke 9:23) He was telling us that following Him isn't easy, and the load can feel too heavy as we are mocked, beaten down, and walking toward certain pain and danger.

As committed followers of Christ, we can't just be aware that suffering is possible; we should expect it will come knocking at our door in a world where sin abounds. Yet Jesus' story didn't end with the cross. Daniel's story didn't end in the pit. David's story didn't end in that battle, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's story didn't end in the flames. They were faithful even unto death, God moved, and the story went from grief to beauty.

Are you like me: somewhere in the unknown, living in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> hour? Are you waiting for the 11<sup>th</sup> hour and watching the sky?

We can't predict what will happen in a fallen world, but we can have hope knowing that our Father holds the pen that writes the pages of our eternal story. He has already written our ending. God has the victory. Through His grace, so do we, no matter what the world throws our way.

I choose hope. I choose to trust that there is a plan beyond what my human eyes can see. I choose to stop watching the clock, to stop reaching my arms *up* toward Heaven, expecting to be lifted out of my circumstances. I will pray for strength to hold my hand *out* so that He can take it and walk beside me – no matter the hour.

*"I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)