

## **Refined in the Fire / Job 23:10**

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Hello ladies! Thank you for coming today and thank you for the honor of your time as you listen to this message I've prepared for you. It is exciting – and not a little scary! – to be able to share it. I have thought and prayed about it continuously since the Lord first began to lay it on my heart in January, and I hope that His voice comes through clearly.

With that in mind, I ask for your graciousness. Though I have been a Christian essentially my whole life, my deeper diving into the word is relatively new and I am FAR from an expert on it.

In fact, I had to do some serious spiritual battle leading up to today as the accuser wanted to label me a fraud. Of course he would be right. I don't have what it takes to tell any one of you who you are or what you should be doing, but I could fight back against that voice because I know that in me lives the one who does have that right.

I hope that my lack just gives him that much more opportunity to shine.

As I said, this message first started to form in January. Our team had decided on refined in the fire for the theme of this springs event and my original thoughts were centered around gold decor. So naturally when I was working on a gold themed event for work I made sure to look around and take mental note of ideas to use today... but looking at the beautiful displays I was also saddened.

It's all false gold... As a team we do love to create a beautiful setting. It's one of the ways we outwardly show our love for you. But the decorations don't leave with you. We want you to leave here with REAL gold.

Realizing this, as I set up that unsubstantial event I began to pray for a message of substance.

Honest moment here, because I suspect I'm not alone in this. I started off that prayer time by TELLING God. I TOLD Him, that maybe we were wrong for a refiner's fire theme. We don't experience war or famine, we are physically comfortable and religiously free... could we HONESTLY speak on refining fire?!

He didn't see it that way though! I had to fight to keep it together (remember I was at work during all of this and I am someone whose every emotion shows on her face!) as he hit me with the realization that His daughters right here are in the fire. What's more, much more in fact, He impressed on me that some of His daughters in this room are at risk of being consumed by the fire. They have forgotten who He made them to be and how He uses fires to refine that image and strengthen them for their intended purposes.

Some of these fires are His, they are brought by Him. Yes, they are uncomfortable but they are beautiful. They are to make us into the women He created us to be. Some of these fires we bring on ourselves. We experience the here and now consequences of our own sins and, God willing, we learn from them and let go of that sin. These fires too are a gift and they serve to purify us. Sadly, some of the fires are simply from living in a fallen world – or worse direct attacks. Yet even these God can use to show us His unfailing love, supreme power and constant presence.

How then do we survive these fires? Grow from these fires? Come away made BETTER by these fires? We do so by knowing who we are made to be and by clinging to the one who made us.

So who are you made to be? You are made to be a bearer of the image of the one true God! In Genesis it says "God created mankind in his own image... male and female he created them."

That image was marred at the fall, when Adam and Eve first chose Sin. Yet even as God tells them that their choice will bring hardship and ultimately death, He gives them a promise that a savior will come.

Faith in that coming savior defined God's people until the time of Jesus. Jesus, that blessed redeemer. God himself, made human. Taking on the sin of the world, dying to pay its price, and rising again so that humanity could be restored.

From there on, God's people were no longer defined by faith in a coming savior but instead by receiving the gift of the savior who CAME. Those of us who call ourselves Christians have declared in that name that we have IN US the restored image of God.

Once again, thanks to that gift, we can be called children of God. Offspring of the Lord of all Creation. We women can be called daughters of the one true King. Like Sarai before us, we can accept his new name for us. We can be a Sarah – a God proclaimed princess.

Whoo! Princess... I suspect this isn't the first time in Christian circles you've heard the term princess for Christian women. You might not like it... Is it theologically SOUND? Is it vain? Is it entitled? Is it too weak? Is it just not.. me?

As for theology, while Christian woman = princess isn't stated directly in the bible, we ARE called children of God the King. And a Daughter of the King is a princess. So I think we are okay from a strictly terminological sense.

If we were talking about princesses the way the world does, then it would be wise to be hesitant on that term because it is so tied up in the world with vanity, superficiality, self-idolatry and flimsy cultural connotations. But I am a big fan of not giving up ground to the enemy, so if he wants to distort princesses then I'm going to fight back. I pray that after today you'll fight back with me and reclaim Godly princesshood.

I first started to get on board a couple of years ago when God gave me the opportunity to see who His princesses really are. I was helping in common grounds and my young daughter Claire wanted to join me. I set her up on a stool and gave her the task of drying carafes.

She was dressed beautifully in a puffy peach colored dress and was excited for our plans after the service. We were taking her cousin for a birthday outing to get their nails and "makeup" done at a kid friendly spa. She was excited – in her Disney loving three year old way - to be like princesses!

Yet as she talked, she worked. I watched her stand on that stool by the sink, dressed in her princess finery juxtaposed by that sweaty kitchen. She diligently and joyfully dried the carafes.

It was there and then that God opened my eyes to what a princess really is. With a gasp at His presence and tears in my eyes, I had to share it with her "Claire THIS, this is being a princess! You are serving your father's kingdom and that is what a princess does. He is SO pleased in you right now, and so am I!"

Thanks be to God that our little children can teach us so much. I'm no longer embarrassed to be deemed a princess because I know that HIS princesses are not superficial, they are servants of the heavenly kingdom! They are not naïve, they are full of true wisdom and fear of the Lord. And their throne is not empty of power because it is the one they sit on with their father.

It's the most powerful throne there is! Oh what a wonderful privilege He has given us to sit with Him as His daughters. Honestly... think on that for a moment. Sitting on that powerful throne, held like a child in the loving arms of your father the king.

What's more, when we accept that invitation and receive the crown that He bought for us on the cross, we are given incredible purposes for his Kingdom. He sees us as worthy to do big jobs in service of the kingdom.

We are servant princesses! We are made to help the weak and give them strength to carry on, to serve our brothers and sisters diligently showing them the love of the King for His people. We feed the hungry and clothe the naked... we dry carafes and we change diapers. We fill communion cups and write minutes at ministry meetings. We care for elderly parents who can no longer do it themselves. We talk through difficult days with neighbors. We pray together... We praise together! We LOVE each other, because He first loved us!

What's more we fight together. We are warrior princesses meant to stand together and fight the spiritual forces that threaten. Our Father's fortress is strong and ultimate victory is assured. But still we fight in obedience so that we can have the joy of sharing in His victory! We fight so that the casualties stay low.

We have been slacking in this department as women for a very long time. Even Isaiah warned against it saying "Tremble, you women who are at ease; Be troubled, you complacent daughters." At ease is a military term, and it is clear in this text it is not a good thing. We sit at ease, hoping that somebody else will fight the fight, but we should be troubled enough to rise up!

But then how, on earth, do we do that? To start with, you arm yourself!

\*the belt of truth buckled around your waist

\*the breastplate of righteousness in place

\*feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace

\*the shield of faith

\*the helmet of salvation

\*and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

You put on that armor and you train. Spend time actively studying your bible and knowing the truth that is in it so that you can be confident when you hear the lies. Live righteously keeping a short account with God and man. Have faith and PRAY.

Above it all – you love the heck out people!!! You give them the Word of God which isn't just the words in the bible but Jesus HIMSELF who loved so much that he died for us even while we were sinners.

Love people like that. Love them if they are believers living in righteousness or if they're faltering. Love them if they're unbelievers because not only are we servants and warriors within our own kingdom walls, but we are ambassadors!

We Are Ambassador princesses. Far too many princes and princesses are still outside the walls of the kingdom. They do not remember beyond a seemingly vain hope that they are made for more than this broken world.

Just as God's instruction to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply so that they would spread the image of God through procreation, Jesus' final instruction to us before ascension was to spread the image of God. He said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." Matthew 28:19.

Being a Godly princess is no empty title, it is a big job, with VERY big rewards and preparing for it is not always... we face big fires, but we face them with the backing of a VERY big King.

As Daughters of the king - Princesses tasked to be servants, warriors, and ambassadors - we do not do any of it in our own strength. It is entirely because of Christ IN us that we are capable. Little by little he refines us so that he is more visible in us and we are stronger for it.

Knowing now why God wanted us to talk about refining fires, I thought I should get to know them a little more beyond the metaphorical sense and, it's really interesting how Gold is processed!

The Gold pulled from the ground is surrounded by rock and must be broken in to smaller and smaller pieces until finally it – and the rock – are a powder. The powder goes through a chemical process and filtering to produce gold-bearing carbon. All of this precedes already happens before you even get to the refining stage!

Here though, in that refining fire, the gold is subjected to extreme heat and melted down to reveal and separate it from the other metals that are present. The final result is 99.9% pure gold. Yet what good is pure gold? It IS consistently valuable, but... on its own it's too soft and weak for most of the final purposes.

I remember shopping for my wedding ring and being surprised that the jeweler suggested the lower karat gold because it would hold up better to the test of time with fewer scratches, dents and breakage than the higher karat pieces.

So how is it then that gold is made stronger to be useful like that? It is made an alloy by mixing with another metal. This metal gives it strength and can change the appearance of the gold making the white, yellow, or rose golds that you see on the market.

So imagining this process for our lives, we can see the pain of the process leading up to and including the refinery stage as we are purified.

Metalsmiths say that they know it is time to remove the precious metal from the fire when they can see their reflection in it. Likewise, it true for us that the image of God in us is more visible when the impurity is pulled away!

The result of that refining is soft and malleable, here is where we can be shaped by God to the unique form he has planned.

Yet to be of practical use we must be strong and this is where we are made an alloy by an infusion of the strongest substance – God’s Holy Spirit. He gives you himself!

It all makes me think of Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

This is the way that you can best withstand the pain of the fallen world, resist temptation, and go out boldly shining for all to see as you fulfill your purpose as a servant, warrior, ambassador princess. This is the way that you can say like Job “when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

He brings us those refining fires to reshape us, to strengthen His image in us. I was brought to that place in a big way a few years ago. I was scared and nearly abandoned my faith, but as scary as it was it was the moment that changed everything for me and was what prompted the greatest growth my faith has seen.

That pain and inner turmoil comes out as He is revealing Himself more deeply or rending belief in religion from belief in HIM. It is really hard to let go of something when you think it’s right. But like Eve determining that the fruit of that cursed tree was “good to eat”, so too we are terrible judges of what is truly GOOD.

God loved me, even then, too much to leave me believing in lies or half-truths. So too, He wants YOU to KNOW Him for who He really is. So yes, He will bring people in to your lives who say uncomfortable things. He will confront you with your idolatry of religion. And He will let you come through fire, because He loves you and knows that it is worth that pain to be transformed. He knows that the change in you from that fire will be an undeniable sight for all to see, leading even more to seek His face.



Some fires though, they aren't about our false theology... Some fires burn continually around us in this fallen world. Everyone is aware of these, even an unbeliever sees that this world has suffering.

Preparing for this day I thought of women in my life who struggled to conceive or who lost children too early. those losing loved ones to the ravages of time and disease. some suffering personally with physical ailments and illnesses. The ones betrayed by friends, family members, or a romantic partner... and of women in general bound by the bi-polar expectations of present day feminism. No doubt you have your own experiences coming to mind.

When Adam and Eve chose to follow their own desires over God's will they introduced to this world the knowledge of Good and Evil – and the death that accompanies it. From then on the world, and all in it, would struggle to do good.. as Genesis 7:5 says "every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." We see that. People hurt each other and distorted creation flares up.

Sometimes we are relieved to have a distance from those fires. Other times we are right in the middle of them. The world is right on us. When life goes wrong, as it does, it can be hard to see the hand of God. It can be hard to praise his name. It can be hard to serve him and tell others what a joy it is to know him.

It's okay to admit that... God is the God of the real, not of pretend. He knows the fire that is burning and he knows it's hard to see Him through the smoke and the flames. It is for these times that he has given you helpers. He knew we would need them, right from the beginning when he looked at Adam and said that it was not good for him to be alone.

As a spiritual family you have many brothers and sisters – your fellow princes and princesses – who have been put here, in part, to help you

through difficult times. Above all though, you have the king himself God as your helper.

When you are faced with fire, with pain, with betrayal, with unmet expectations, with suffering cling to the words of the one who made you and who will be with you through it all. Claim Psalm 66:12 as a promise that God will bring you through the fire.

When suffering at the hand of another, hold your head high – not with false bravado but instead, like the writer of Hebrews, “say with confidence, “The Lord is my **helper**; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

The God of all compassion is not unaware of your suffering and he will not leave you alone in it. Though it may be – and trust me I know – the most difficult, most uninviting notion to do so, these are the times to reach for him. Yes, acknowledge that you’re struggling to see him, but still reach out - blind as you are - trusting that he will be there to greet you. Read your bible, pray, ASK for prayer – and LISTEN for his voice.

In this way, these fires do serve a good. They refine your faith – which 1 Peter 1:7 says “is far more precious than mere gold”. In hindsight they are often the moments that make you bold as you recall the one who brought you through and the love of his followers in it.

Much suffering does come from living in a fallen world, but not all of it is external. I can say with a high degree of certainty that I’m not the only one in this room who has sinned. The genesis verse I quoted before didn’t say only unbeliever’s hearts were inclined to evil.... That was all mankind (which yes, includes womankind). There are sins in our lives, and we have a tendency to act like they aren’t there.

There are sins that I fear we have forgotten are sins... idolatry, gluttony, and foolishness for example.

There are sins that we like to think we haven't committed, but Jesus raised the bar so that anger to a brother is tantamount to murder, so if we really look at our hearts honestly then I doubt any of us could check a single one of the ten commandments off the list. I know I can't.

Then there are those sins that we like to hide - especially as women! We like to leave them for the world or for the men... but we need to be admit that violence, addiction and sexual deviation are real for us as well.

Acknowledging our sin is an incredibly difficult thing to do... It is painful to admit that we are less than we hope to be, but acknowledging it is necessary so that we can repent and be healed. So that we can continue in our transformation into the image of Christ.

Probably one of the most famous refining fire verses is Zechariah 13:9 "I will refine them like silver and test them like gold." Yet even here, in the midst of one of the bible's most chilling condemnations of a sinful nation, he follows with a promise for those enduring the fire "They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

Those that see their sins in the fire can cry out like the Psalmist "Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my **helper**. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior." And do so knowing that 1 John holds true "if anybody does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

So, yes, it is difficult, but these are not fires to pull away from. When you experience the natural consequences of sin in your life or heart acknowledge it and call on the one who loves you enough to make you pure.

What then when you see sin in the life of another? There are so many verses that come to mind here – Judge not lest ye be judged... Be as iron sharpening iron... or the good old plank in your own eye admonishment.

The one I'd like to give you today though is a simple interpretation of Proverbs 11:27 "anyone can find the dirt in someone. Be the one to find the gold!"

Yes please be the one who finds the gold! Who when living with their gold on display wants to keep around their dirt? Be a voice of loving truth, able to shine God's light because you were dirt covered, broken, surrounded by flame, molded, and made new by the loving hands of the Refiner who died for you.

I said earlier that I had to do spiritual battle leading up to today. I wasn't alone in that though. The enemy had every desire to keep this event from happening, to stop sisters in Christ from gathering together and praising the name of Jesus, to stop newborn princesses from receiving their crown. To stop sinners from repenting and being refined, to stop warriors from putting on their armor.

He will bring you fires too I'm sorry to say... Yet what that old serpent intends for harm God will use for good. Remember who you are – remember WHOSE you are - and that the devil's defeat is assured. Call on God to go before you, call on your brothers and sisters to come beside you, and when you come out the other side rejoice!

So here I am Singed and sweaty but awestruck at the strength of God. I can proclaim victory by speaking this message. I hope you leave here today knowing that you too were made in the image of the one true God. That you are loved so dearly by Him as His daughter. And that when you repent of sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in you then you have everything in you to get through whatever kind of fires come your way. You can shine brightly, as refined gold strengthened by God to fulfill his purposes for you as a servant, a warrior, and an ambassador for His Holy Kingdom.

I'm going to close now with a prayer from Christian author Debbie Kay that I felt fit well with this message then we will have a closing song. If you are here today and you have never heard that you are a daughter of the king, but feel ready to receive that crown by proclaiming Christ as savior and Lord over your life, or if you are presently suffering in a fire and need the support of a warrior princess to pray with you I would invite you, during and after the song, to grab a table mate, a friend, me or one of the ladies stationed at the door. Take some time to talk and pray on it. We are here for you and would love nothing more than to see a child of God standing strong with the assurance of her father.

First though, please join me in this prayer before our song:

Lord, so many of us feel like the walking wounded now.

We are battle weary and oh so tired.

We are broken and battered and at times feel like we aren't going to be able to recover from the hurts of this life.

The enemy is unrelenting in his attacks as he hopes to see us surrender to the pain and to try to make us useless and ineffective.

He is constantly trying to make us doubt you and he thinks that if he can make us lose hope, that he has achieved victory.

Lord, we ask that you pour your grace upon us.

We cling to your promises that you are near to us and though at times it feels as though we are losing the battle, we cling to the hope and the knowledge that we are NOT defeated.

We are surrounded and attacked on all sides, but we are not crushed and we will NOT be overtaken!

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ - Amen