

Shaping A Nation - God In Flames

Exodus 3:1-15

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Reading - **EXODUS 3:1-12, p.50(OT)**

It's not the sort of thing you expect when you go to work as an average Joe on an average day. Moses certainly didn't – a life-changing encounter with God, right in the middle of his shepherd shift. Out minding his own business, caring for the sheep, and...

God shows up,
speaks up,
in a bush that doesn't burn up,
and changes Moses' life forever.

First comes the human bait - the enticement of a burning bush. And Moses bites - goes over to take a look.

Second comes the divine call - "*Moses, Moses.*" And the shepherd had to make a choice. Respond, and stay. Or turn and walk away. He could have done either. But he chooses to stay.

Third, then, comes the holy command - "*take off your sandals...*" In that culture slaves went barefoot. Moses is called to submit to God - to become prepared to act for God, the divine Master. There, too, the shepherd has to make a choice. Say "yes" or "no". Sandals off or on. And then - follow through on what God commands, or walk away from it.

God appears in fire. It's the only recorded incident in history of God appearing in a burning bush. But it is **not** the only time we see, read and experience God in fire.

Fire - it is one of the most powerful forces on earth: light, heat, enormous energy that can work great good and can bring tremendous destruction. It can illuminate. It can heat. It can purify. It can consume.

God - the greatest power in all the Cosmos - appears on our little planet earth in the potent visual symbol of fire.

Through history, others besides Moses have also experienced God in fire. Blaise Pascal, famous mathematician, physicist, philosopher and theologian kept a little piece of paper sewn in the lining of his jacket. That paper was only found after his death. It documented a private spiritual experience -

THE MEMORIAL

In the year of grace, 1654, on Monday, 23 Novemeber... from about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve,

FIRE.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars...

God of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God...

Renunciation, total and sweet.

Total submission to Jesus Christ...

How exactly Pascal experienced the fire - as reality or vision - no one knows.

But he DID experience it. And his life, like Moses', was never the same.

Dwight Moody prayed for many years to be filled with all that he could handle of the power of God. One day, while walking down a Chicago street, he felt a sudden burning in his heart. It increased to the point that he had to stop walking and find a place to lie down. It overwhelmed him to the point that he began to pray for it to stop. That experience marked a change for him. He became one of North America's greatest preachers.

A few years ago the son of a colleague was driving his jeep near Dallas, Texas. He picked up a hitchhiker, who began to talk with him about Jesus Christ. As they talked, both of them had an uncanny sense of God's presence. It was as if the jeep was filled with heavenly fire and light. [Bruce Larson, *The Presence*, p.24]

A member of this congregation once shared with me a personal encounter they had - an overwhelming vision of God's Presence. "Bright, very bright. Yellows and oranges and..." That person then stopped with a shake of the head, just couldn't continue. Even the memory of the experience of God's firepower was overwhelming. While this person is still trying to come to grips with it, the individual's faith and passion for Christ have increased enormously.

The Presence In The Flame

God is the God of fire.

It's a fire that requires no fuel; HE - His holy power is the fuel.

God's presence through fire shows up all through the Scripture. Let me share some examples:

- T Exodus 13: 21 The LORD guided Israel through the desert "by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night."
- T Exodus 19:18 "All Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had descended on it in the form of fire."
- T Daniel 10 - The prophet Daniel wrote: "On April 23, as I was standing beside the great Tigris River, I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a dazzling gem. From his face came flashes like lightning, and his eyes were like flaming torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice was like the roaring of a vast multitude of people. I, Daniel, am the only one who saw this vision. The men with me saw nothing, but they were suddenly terrified and ran away to hide. So I was left there all alone to watch this amazing vision. My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak." [NLT]
- T Luke 3:16 John [said], "I baptize with water; but someone is coming who is greater than I am -- so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
- T Acts 2:3 - tongues of flame appear on the heads of the disciples during the great Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- T Rev 1: 14 John, during his Sunday worship, receives a vision of the Lord. *"His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were bright like flames of fire."* John says, v.17, *"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead."*

The Judgement In The Flame

The judgement of God shows itself through Scripture as fire. Here's just a few examples of the fire that destroys impurities and spares the gold:

- One of the greatest examples is in Gen 19 Sodom & Gommorah - cities of sin totally wiped off the map by a rainstorm of fire.
- Malachi 3:2 "Who will be able to endure it when [God] comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal or like a strong soap that whitens clothes.
- 2 Peter 3:12 You should look forward to that day and hurry it along -- the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames.

Yes, God of fire!

That is the God Moses encounters.

That is the same Lord whom we worship.

Remember that, friends. Has it ever occurred to you while you are praying to the Lord, asking Him to be with you, what it would be like if you could **SEE** Him being with you? How do you think you respond? Why would it be any different, say, than the response of Daniel and his friends, or St.John?

Overwhelming power; fire power - the power of God.

If you dare to pray for it, be careful. Should the Lord grant your request, life will never be the same!

Whether you ask to experience it, or not - please REMEMBER:

Remember the fire.

Remember God is the God of fire.

Remember His power.

You don't have to run away in terror. But a holy healthy respect is certainly due to Him. Hebrews 12:28-29 says:

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be destroyed, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire. [NLT]

The Voice In The Flame

In that fire, then, God's voice speaks to Moses.

Remember, while God continues to speak, it is not always in the flame, in the powerful, in the mighty moments. The prophet Elijah was shown huge earthquakes and fire and thunder. God wasn't in them. The Lord spoke to him in a still, small voice.

The way God speaks may change.

But remember this, believer - God's voice does not go silent.

The same voice that spoke at the bush continues to speak today.

It is the voice that spoke to Professor Pascal. And to Pastor Moody. And to the believer here at Calvin Church.

Hebrews 1 reminds us that God speaks in all sorts of different ways at different times and places of history. It may be in fire experiences. It may also be in quiet visions. It may be an audible voice in our head. Or events in nature. Or a word from a person near us that we can't shake, and somehow we know it is intended right for us. Or circumstances that come together in a unique way.

Remember this, though - The Bible stands as final rule and authority of God's Word and Will for us. Whatever other voices you hear, or circumstances you experience, if they contradict the clear teaching of Scripture, reject them immediately as ungodly deceptions., deceptions that will destroy you and tear you further away from Jesus, the Great Holy Spirit fire-giving Word of God.

He, who baptizes with fire, is the greatest voice and Word of God ever seen and ever possible here on earth.

Pay attention to Him.

Respond to Him.

First of all.

Before anything else.

So - before asking any more questions about fire, and divine voices -

Be sure that you have heard and responded to the great Word of God as it comes in Jesus Christ.

Be sure that you have opened your heart and mind and body up to Him.

That you have invited Him into your heart.

That you have responded to His invitation of relationship with you.

That is the central essence of the Christian faith.

That you look to Jesus.

That you focus on Jesus.

And then

after surrendering to Christ

Only then

begin to look for God's voice and fire in your life.

And trust that, on some level, every one who surrenders to Jesus will be tinged by fire - the fire of the Holy Spirit.

So...

Have you surrendered to Jesus?

Ask yourself - if the Lord communicates, somehow, that a change is needed in your life, are you willing to make it?

That's key.

Not only being open to experiencing God's fire and presence.

Not only stopping to listen when he calls our name.

But then willing to obey when he calls us to act. Just like Moses not only stopped in the middle of his average day for the unique experience, and not only stopped to listen when his name was called - but showed himself willing to obey when God called him out to act.

In Matthew 21 Jesus describes a father with two sons - one who listens quietly to his father's requests and then goes away without obeying; the second son grumbling, but then heading out to obey. Neither is ideal. "But whatever you do," Jesus says, "Don't think that just sitting quietly and listening to the Lord, **without putting it into practice**, will please Him at all."

Psalm 66:18 says that when we harbour willfully sinful actions in our lives, the Lord shuts down his flow of power and communication to us.

Obedience is required.

God's appearing in fire.

It may happen here in church. It may happen in the middle of your work day, like it did for Moses.

Be open for it.

Be ready for it.

The Bible tells us – 1 Thes 5:19-22:

*"Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. **Test** everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil."*

How do you test?

- With Scripture first of all. It's the big rudder for life. If there is any hint of contradiction reject it immediately as being work of darkness or imagination cloaked in light.

- Check it with God's people. 1 Cor 14:29 commands the community to weigh what 2 or 3 prophets say. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20 that He is present with power where 2 or 3 gather together.

To suggest that you'll get it right by yourself, without the support of other believers is an arrogant myth of contemporary society. Isaiah 53:6 speaks about believers going astray, and says, "*each one has turned to **his own** way....*"

A third way of testing is by looking at the fruit that results from listening to certain thoughts or circumstances. (Mt 7:20; 12:33) Ask:

- does it build faith?
- does it provide hope?
- does it restore creation?
- does it produce gratitude?
- does it exalt Jesus Christ?

The prophet Jeremiah encourages us- "*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*" [Jer 29:13]

Go for it.

Pray for the fire to descend and enter your life.

Knowing this - that when it happens and we yield ourselves in faith, we become part of God's great saving work - a long time-line of work. We become a link in the chain being forged by the Spirit.

We become part of God's fire team -

- passing along His holy warmth to those whose lives are chilled by tragedy and suffering and injustice

- giving light to those caught in the darkness of spiritual wandering

- consuming, destroying evil where it seeks to undo the goodness of God's creation.

So, go believer.

Head back to your everyday life.

Listen and watch for holy God moments.

And - be ready to take your shoes off and submit as a servant.

