

The Burning Bush

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the necessity of encountering God in the wilderness to be effectively sent for the deliverance of His people.

Scripture: Exodus 3:1

Topics: "Divine Calling", "Wilderness Preparation"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of the burning bush encounter in Moses' life, illustrating that true preparation for God's calling often occurs in the wilderness, a place of obscurity and humility. He draws parallels between Moses' journey and the current state of Israel, suggesting that a second Exodus is imminent, requiring a people who are willing to be sent by God after being shaped in the desert. Katz challenges the church to recognize the importance of being 'sent' in the apostolic sense, which requires a deep encounter with God's glory and a willingness to confront the powers of darkness. He urges believers to turn aside from their distractions and comfort to seek the God who reveals Himself in the midst of trials and afflictions. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a genuine response to God's call, asking if we are ready to say, 'Here I am' when He sends us.

Transcript

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Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of the bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am." (Exodus 3:1-4) "And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (vs.

9-10). This is more than just an episode out of the life of Moses. There is something here for our deepest consideration, and I hope it will be for some as much a confrontation as it was for Moses.

We have as much a requirement to be met by the God of the burning bush and be sent by Him to deliver a people out of bondage. There is unquestionably a second 'Exodus' ahead for Israel. It will not be confined to a single nation, Egypt, as alluded to here. 'Egypt' is all the nations into which Israel will be sent, and she will need to be brought out in the purpose of God by someone who will come to her out of God and His authority as deliverer. There is no prospect of our being sent at all in any true sense unless we are first willing to be prepared by God in the wilderness, just as Moses himself was.

The fact that Moses was Jewish, a Levite, and a prince in Egypt counted nothing as qualification for being the deliverer of a nation. However impressive things were humanly, he had to be emptied of them in order to be qualified. It is a remarkable paradox, that in order to be sent of God, we have to be emptied first of our qualification. It may not seem as though present-day Israel or world Jewry are experiencing oppression under a 'Pharaoh.' In fact, things have never been more comfortable and affluent right now.

It will not long remain so. Let this message be put on a shelf and taken down at a later stage when things begin to unfold as we anticipate. This people will be exceedingly oppressed worldwide in a final attempt of 'Pharaoh', who is the statement of Satan, to extinguish or annihilate them from the face of the earth. Their restoration at the end of the age to the purposes of God signals the release of the Lord from heaven. He is contained in the heavens awaiting the restoration of all things spoken by the prophets since the world began, namely, that this people would be restored in the Last Days out of ages long apostasy.

A surviving remnant of them, which will stand for the entire nation, will be the focus of the theocratic Kingdom of God in the earth. There is only one government that is true government and that is the government of God. It is called THEO-cracy (The rule of God). It is the coming rule of Jesus as King. He can only rule from one place^¾the throne of David, on the holy hill of Zion, which is in the city of Jerusalem. Not the Jerusalem that is now, but the one that will come when both it and the people who occupy it will be restored of God by a process that will take place throughout all nations in a remarkable sifting of a Last Days' trial and tribulation.

This is not unlike them being brought into the Land the first time by a deliverer named Moses (through a wilderness trek that not many survived). There will be a second Exodus. The critical question that faces the church is whether there is a 'Moses people' being framed and formed in the hidden part of the desert, who can receive the call of God to be sent, to bring Israel out of the clutches of 'Pharaoh' that they might be brought in. If there is any unsavory and unwelcome place from which charismatics shrink, it is the backside of the desert.

Mt. Horeb is the Mount of God. And that mount is only found in one place^¾the backside of the desert. In other words, you never find it on the front side. The front side is where the 'religious' action is, with all of its glass cathedrals and movements and excitement and glittery personalities. The backside is obscure, dreary, hot, and full of reproach. It is for failures. It is for those who have taken a shot at it and missed, and have left behind the testimony to their failure^¾one dead Egyptian in the sand.

Moses was full of well-meaning intentions, but well-meaning intentions will never be the instrument of God. God may even allow you to be moved by the knowledge of the plight and distress of His people that you might act out of your own human response. But our humanity has no place in this. God wants to emphasize, "I have heard the cries of this people^¾now, therefore, I send you." You don't go because you

know their condition; you go on one basis alone, and that is that God has sent you.

Do you have an appreciation for the word 'sent'? Do you know that the word 'sent' is at the heart of the word 'apostolic'? If we dismiss the deepest meaning of that word 'sent', then we take away the thing apostolic also. And if we remove apostolic we remove everything. Apostolic means power and authority. It means something in keeping with the very character of God Himself, who is also the High Priest and Apostle of our confession. To be sent is the ultimate thing; but God does not send just any old body.

He sends that one who has been fashioned at His hand after a profound period of forty years of wilderness testing. The one who is content to be lost to obscurity and hidden-ness is the one who is devoid even of his own ambition to save his people until his God encounters him out of a burning thorn bush. The word 'Horeb', the Mount of God, literally means 'desolate.' It comes from the root word meaning 'to be parched through drought, to destroy, make waste, dry up, and make something utterly waste.

What a mount! What a forbearing mount! That is the place where God waits to meet His man. In fire! We all need to be eternally grateful that Moses turned aside to see. If Israel had not been brought out of bondage through a man who was sent, because he turned aside to see, Israel would have perished in her captivity and would never have entered the Land. The whole genealogical development that resulted in the birth of the Messiah would not have taken place. One man turned aside to see.

God called to him out of the midst of the burning bush. I wish I had the ability to say why turning aside to see is so remarkably important. Not everyone will. Not everyone has the stomach to look into something that burns and is not extinguished. It usually signifies some troubling thing that we would just as soon avoid and make as if we did not see it. We would go on our way. It might constitute for us not only an interruption but also an intervention in our lives. It would wreck our own intentions.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever turned away so as not to see and therefore not be accountable for the sight? You had a prickly and uncomfortable feeling that if you turned aside to see, it might have made a requirement of you that you were unwilling to accept. I very rarely quote Rabbis, but I have to say that a rabbinical interpretation of this verse is full of insight. What they say is that when one turns aside to see a sight of this kind, one will never be the same again.

It has a certain ultimacy about it. The concept of burning brings with it a sense of judgment and of a God who is a consuming fire. Burning heat and a God in the midst of it is a strange kind of apparition. It has got to upset things as we understand them, and if you have seen that, you never turn back to see things as you have seen them before. Our God will only send those who will first encounter Him in the revelation of His burning glory. If we do not glimpse Him in His glory, we cannot serve Him rightly.

We will have some other motive, some flaky thing, some personal ambition that has to do with our religious success^¾thereby corrupting and spoiling everything. There is only one true motive for pure, godly service and that is to have but one jealousy, passion and motive, namely, the glory of God. But if you do not glimpse the glory, then how shall it be your motive? This is so much a pattern for us. It is not just a historical account of what happened to Moses. By it we should know what could happen to us.

We stand relative to Israel today in the same proximity as Moses did then. There is a drama about to break of a global kind, and somehow the issue of Israel's deliverance is the focus of God and a church chosen not only for that release but for the confrontation with the powers of darkness represented by Pharaoh. There is a difference between a man who murders an Egyptian, leaves him in the sand and flees

in panic when he is discovered, as against a man who is sent in the authority of God to confront Pharaoh himself.

Until he is confronted in the apostolic authority of God as one sent, there is no release for anyone anywhere, let alone an entire nation whose return to God and to the Land of their election constitutes the return of the King and the establishment of His Davidic and Theocratic rule. Where are we as the church today? We are either at the front side or the backside. The backside is for failures who know it and who know that it is not a bad thing. If you don't know you are a failure it is because you have not undertaken anything noble enough to have revealed it.

Your life is too safe and too timid. You have been satisfied with mere pew occupancy; you have not taken great risks for God so that you could fail. I believe that failure is a pre-requisite. It is necessary; it is humiliation, and because of it Moses found himself in a place that few discover, let alone occupy for forty years, shepherding the flock of God. Moses thought himself disqualified, and that very knowledge, that very thing was his qualification. Moses said, "Who am I that I should go," and God never once argued with him.

His reply was rather, "You are not going because you are qualified; you are going because I have chosen you, and I will be with you. That is the basis of your power and authority and your success at being their deliverer. It is not because you were a prince in Egypt or some giddy charismatic star and you had it all laid out and you knew this and that and the other. It is because you have been emptied of those presumptions and are yet willing to continue faithfully in the trying place to shepherd the flock of God.

I have appointed you. Because you are appointed, your preparation is extensive." There will come a day when God will reveal Himself in glory^¾and what kind of God is He? The Glory of God is a consuming fire to be seen in one place only, namely, the backside of the mountain in the wilderness place in a burning thorn bush^¾and in no other. I love a God who exhibits His glory in that place. I love a God who chooses the lowly bush, the everyday, mundane, ordinary thing, and the knock-about grit of life with God's people.

I love, and believe God loves such a people who see things as they really are and as He Himself sees them. He loves a people who look right into the depths of things, though it burns and though it aches and though it hurts. God is there in that affliction, and His glory is there also. Glory must not be necessarily seen or associated with something lustrous. God is meek and lowly and in the midst of the truth of our situation if we have the stomach to look at it. Until we will, we are not apostolic.

We are still charismatic; we are still daydreamers; we are still escapist; we still want some flamboyant personality as our pastor or visiting teacher, etc. We still want the excitement and the diversion. We have not learned to find God in the place where we least expect Him and where He most profoundly is^¾burningly. Have you turned aside to see or have you passed by to get a divorce or to find another congregation? Isn't that what we do? We do not want to deal with the rude root things of our life.

God is real, saints, and He is going to have a church that is real or it is not apostolic and cannot minister to His people Israel. As unregenerate as they are, as proud as they are and as worldly as they are, they have an instinctive sense of what is true and what is phony. The desert is a place in which there is no subterfuge, no disguise, nothing gilded, nothing false, nothing fancy, nothing put-on. That is what it is: dry, barren, grit, sand, heat and sun. It is a place that is unmistakably real, and God allowed Moses to tread in that for forty years before He met him in the blaze of His glory.

When God saw that he turned aside to see, He said, "Now there is an apostolic candidate." Moses did not turn aside to see because he was curious. He turned aside to see why it was that the bush burned but was not consumed. He wanted to know WHY! Here is a man who wanted ultimate answers for the predicament of human existence. He was not content to live with the Holocaust and learn that six million Jews went up in smoke through ovens. He wanted to know WHY! How could such a thing take place in modern times through the most enlightened nation, the cultural bastion of western civilization that produced Beethoven, Brahms, Fichte, Hegel, Neitzsche, Kant and hundreds of others that make us Americans look like 'Johnny-come-latelies' and whose civilization is only skin deep?

How could a nation of that depth produce such horror? Have you asked WHY? The church is the ground and pillar of truth or it is not the church. Is there anything phonier than a phony church? Is there anything that is more false than a church that is not true? Is there anything more uncomfortable, more painful to sit through than a church that is not real, a preaching that is not real? There is something about being false in the church that is so patently a contradiction in terms that if you have anything left of you that is integrity you cannot abide the feeling of it.

You cannot stand to say, "Hello brother or sister," and give a slap on the back and a bear hug and that kind of stuff when you know there is no truth, no reality, no life, no true relationship between each other and before God. God forbid that you should not be occupied and taken up with the ultimate purposes of God as it pertains to Israel and the coming of the King and the restoration of His Kingdom. But it needs a people called of God and prepared of God in the wilderness place.

Can we suffer the reproach of having no flourishing work or great numbers and programs? Can we be content with treading wearily in the everyday grit of the desert place under the blazing heat? If you can keep in that mundane place faithfully 'shepherding' the flock of God, the day is not far off that there will be a revelation of God that you might be sent by Him. When that call comes, will you say, "Here I am."? You have got to love Moses. First he turns aside to see and then the Lord calls him twice.

Anytime the Lord calls you twice you should know, "Uh-oh, this is going to cost me." But even though Moses didn't know it, he said, "Here I am." Have you ever said that? Be honest. Have you ever with all the stops pulled out, without any reservation and any condition said, "Here I am"? I said that, and you know where it brought me? Out of my beautiful Gothic seventeen-room house in Plainfield, New Jersey to a most remote location in northern Minnesota with winter temperatures down to forty below zero.

I can remember some of the leading figures of the church at that time saying to me, "Katz, you've got it all wrong. You've got two and a half million Jews twenty miles away, and you are going to the boondocks?" Try to explain that when there is no explanation, but only an obedience to be rendered. If you say, "Here I am" to God, then put on your safety belt. Your comfort, your conveniences, your lifestyle, your plans of how you are going to serve God might themselves be radically altered.

You might find that there is no service at all but just a stumbling about in an obscure place, totally unseen and unknown, while God is shaping the character of the man or woman. There will come a day to be sent of God, not to confront the peripheral Egyptian, but the Pharaoh himself. How are you doing in that category? Are you going to take cities for God with a shout? I think that the enemy looks at congregations that have such flamboyant ambitions as this, and says, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?"

The issue is not your popularity with men but rather how much you are feared by the Powers of the air? Is there something in you that was both in Jesus and in Paul that is the unmistakable stamp of the

authenticity of God? You are not going to find that place as a casual pew-sitter. It is found and obtained in the wilderness place. God called to Moses and said, "Take off your shoes for the ground on which you stand is holy ground." Holy ground is not some geographical dirt somewhere in Sinai.

It is wherever God transacts with men and women in an utter and ultimate way, without qualification and without hindrance. Where the Lord is Lord totally and actually, and you can be sent without any promise of returning or succeeding. You go because He has sent you. That is holy ground. My Jewish kinsmen will languish unto death under this Egyptian world system until such a people come to it from God. Will you turn aside to see? Can you hear such a call as this? Are you willing to encounter the God of the burning bush and be sent by Him?

Prayer: Father, who is sufficient for these things? Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh? I pray, my God, that you prepare me in this desert of my experience so that I will turn aside to see the God who is a consuming fire and be sent by Him. Amen.

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