

(Men Who Met God): Moses on the Mount

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of experiencing God personally, rather than merely knowing about Him through doctrine, using the burning bush as a powerful symbol of transformation and divine presence.

Duration: 33:39

Scripture: John 8:31

Topics: "Moses"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being a burning bush for God. He uses the example of Moses, who was called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The preacher believes that the world is in a state of decline and needs people who truly represent God's fire and beauty. He also criticizes the idea of transplanting a decadent form of Christianity onto foreign soil, stating that true holiness is not determined by crossing borders.

Transcript

...the school to the sheep and the sand and the silence and the stars. And yet he wasn't ready. After all that, he could have been a poet and an artist and all that added, and a philosopher, and still he wasn't ready.

God had to do something for him, which he did in this experience here. He had to give him what I've called a sense of sacredness. He had to, uh, and beat him down and defeat him with, uh, an encounter, a crisis of encounter.

This had to come to the man. He had the theory, he had the doctrine, he was smooth and he'd had lots of time to dream and to think, but he still wasn't ready. God could make him ready only by bringing him to himself in the crisis of encounter.

He had to meet God. And so, here, God revealed himself to the man at the bush alone, under the frowning brow of Sinai. He experienced God.

God revealed himself as fire. Now, I want to mention that a little, talk a little about it. You know, they say that God is inscrutable and ineffable.

He's a lot of other things, but he is those two things. You can't get at him with your mind. I'd like to say this to you, but I can't because I haven't the time.

But, uh, this, uh, neo, uh, uh, rationalism that's passing for, uh, for Christian theology and evangelicalism irks me, because we are trying to figure God out with our heads, and you can't do it, my brethren. You can only experience God. God rises infinitely above the possibility of ever any man's grasping him intellectually.

And so, God, knowing that he's ineffable, cannot be spoken forth, inscrutable, cannot be reached, dwells in light that no man can approach unto, God sets himself forth by figures and similitudes. And it seems to me his favorite one is fire. You remember that God came to Israel as fire, the fire by night and the bush and by the cloud by day.

And later on, when the temple was built or the tabernacle, he dwelt between the wings of the cherubim as a fire. They call it the Shekinah, the presence of God. And then at Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came upon those 120, he perpetuated that idea of God as fire and carried it over.

And each one of those disciples went out with a flame of fire on his forehead, the same fire, the presence of Almighty God. Not some wild, irrational impulse as some people believe, but the very presence of God is the fire in the scripture. And now God wanted to show Moses who he was and bring him into an encounter with himself in experience.

Now, if there are anybody here that incline to be shy away from the word experience, I'm not one of them. I believe in experience. You know, experience has been defined as a personal, conscious awareness of something by somebody, and that's how we know.

That's how we know, a personal, conscious awareness of something by somebody. The somebody was Moses, and the somebody that he was aware of was God, and it was personal and conscious. He wasn't unconscious.

He didn't seep through into his subconscious. He was awake and aware of what was going on, and he had an encounter with God that changed him so he never was the same man. Moses experienced God, and from here on it was no longer theory, no longer knowledge by description that now became knowledge by experience or by acquaintance.

The Scottish philosopher Carlyle once was walking with the new minister in the garden beside the Kirk, and he linked his arm in the minister's arm and said, Reverend, what this parish needs is somebody who knows God otherwise than by hearsay. I'm convinced that a great many of us, even evangelicals, know God only by hearsay. He is what we want him to be or hope that he is, rather than what we know him to be by spiritual encounter.

I think a tragic breakdown in evangelical circles is this one, that we have used doctrine as a substitute for spiritual experience. Spiritual experience should be the outgrowth of doctrine. But we make doctrine terminal, and if we can recite the creed and know the notes of the Scofield Bible, we're all set.

We have it, but a lot of people stop right there and never go on to experience God. Bible doctrine is a highway to lead us to God, but there are many evangelicals asleep beside the highway, and because they are on the highway or near the highway, they call themselves evangelicals. To me an evangelical is somebody who not only believes the credo of the Christian, but who experiences the God of the Christian.

I believe that there ought to be some prophets rise in the day in which we live and declare that God can be experienced, that we can know God, that we don't have to make God a logical deduction from premises,

but that we can experience God as we can experience our children. My son came to meet me with four grandchildren at the airport last evening, and I knew they were my grandchildren. I could prove they were by deduction, but when they grabbed me, I knew they were my grandchildren by experience.

I believe that God can be known deep in the heart by spiritual experience. God wanted to say some things to Moses, and he did. He defeated Moses here and took all the self-confidence out of the man and beat him down and then raised him up.

It's always God's way. Some of the things that I think he taught Moses there, and I think he wants to teach you and me, if we are going to be used at all of God, I will give you now. One is that the fire dwelt in the bush, and the bush was at the mercy of the fire.

That is, it accepted the rule of the fire. When you hold a creed, that's all very well, but you'll never amount to anything until the creed holds you. As long as you hold the doctrine of God, that's all very well.

It's better than being an atheist. But until God holds you and uses you as an extension of his own hands, you're not yet where you ought to be. This is indicated here or taught us in the beautiful figure, if not in the type, that the fire dwelt in the bush.

Now, I'm a great believer in the indwelling Christ, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Not Christ with you only, though that's true, but Christ in you, which is the hope of glory. The problem of personality, interpenetrating personality, isn't a heavy one for me.

I get blessed on lots of things that other people don't understand, and I admit I don't either, but they look good to me, and God blesses me, as the brother said, without much provocation. So I get help, I get a lot of help, and there are a lot of problems that I don't have. An Anglican pastor came to me once and said, I'd like to ask you two questions.

One, how do you explain the problem of the eternal God entering time? And the second one is, what's meant by the light that lighted every man that came into the world? And I said, Doctor, as for that first problem, I don't have the answer to the question, I don't even have the question. It isn't even a problem to me how the eternal God can enter time's low tabernacle and become flesh to dwell among us. So I waved him off on that.

He said, all right, about the second one, and then I did have an opinion on that. But the problem of how personality interpenetrates personality was settled for me a long time ago. That is, my head got hold of it by the iron in the fire.

You put the iron in the fire and blow the old-fashioned bellows, and pretty soon you have the fire and the iron. You do not have the loss of either personality. The iron is still the iron and the fire is still the fire, but you have them fused in experience.

And if the fire goes out of the iron, you still have the two. So God enters the human breast and fuses his divine, uncreated personality with the created personality that is his child, and they do not become metaphysically or ontologically one, but they become experientially one. The fire, the glowing incandescence of the presence of God in the breast of a man, he becomes a little like God, and there is much of God in him and about him.

And yet he is not God, and God is not the man. Forever and forever God remains God, and the man remains the man, and yet their personalities are united. God was trying to say that to Moses, and he is saying that to us.

This is what we need for Christian workers, any kind of Christian workers. Then I noticed that the bush was purified by the fire. I suppose that if we were to pass around the questionnaire and ask your definition of sanctification, there are 700 of me, and we would have 700 definitions.

For that reason, I cannot possibly allow myself to get involved in doctrinal disputes over the word. But I believe that God wants his people to be holy. I do believe that.

But I do not believe holiness is ever separated from God. God is holy, and only God is holy. And where God is, there is holiness, and where God is not, there is just us.

And there is no use to try to make it any otherwise. The bush was purified by the fire. Do you ever stop to think that all the fungi and every bug and all the larvae and worms and all perished out of that bush? There wasn't a single thing there but bush and fire.

And I believe that the presence of God burning in the human breast purifies that breast, and as long as it burns there unhindered, those evils that used to follow us around and be part of our personality will be burned away and there will be nothing but white ash to show where they used to be. I don't know much about medicine, you know. I'm a preacher, and of course I read the Reader's Digest.

It's an awful lot of medical education. You can get a tremendous amount of medical education from Reader's Digest. But I read that there are heat-proof microbes that you can boil them for 2 hours and they still come up smiling, they don't die.

But nothing can stand raw fire. Nothing, nothing can stand raw fire. All life dies before the flame.

And so there are evils in the breast that can stand the presence of all kinds of revival meetings and religious meetings and prayer meetings. There are sins that can get on a board, that can take the Lord's supper, that can get baptized, but there are no sins that can stand up under the presence of the indwelling God. The third thing is that the bush was transfigured by the flame.

That bush was only a scrub thorn, an acacia bush, and there were millions of them growing around there, and Moses had seen them by the hundreds. But this bush suddenly became the most famous bush in all history and still remains the most famous bush in all history. Its glory was a derived glory.

God did not make the bush great, he simply got in the bush and was great in the bush. And so the attention of everybody was called to the bush. The Sunday school teacher was teaching about the bush, and she said, you know, Moses was a great scientist, he was a very observing man.

And when he saw the fire burning in the bush, his scientific spirit came out, and he said, now I'll go and turn aside and examine this. Imagine that, those poor kids had to listen to that kind of stuff. The simple fact is, anybody with an I.Q. above 6 and 7 8 would have turned aside to see a fire in a bush at sundown, miles from human habitation.

That's all Moses did, he turned aside to see that bush, that transfigured bush. And it took on meaning, it got significance there. It itself was related by nature to all the other Acacia bushes, and yet nobody ever

talked about them, except me, and they all talk about that one bush.

Why? Because it had the fire in it. You know, one of the saddest things I know is the anonymity of the average man. Emerson said the average man and woman is only one more couple, and you go out on the highways or down to the street corners or into the far jungle areas, wherever you will, east or west, north or south, and you find thousands of people crawling like animated clothespins over the face of the earth.

And then they're born, they live, they suffer, they have a bit of joy, then they die and the place knows them no more. They're faceless, without significance and without meaning. But when Jesus Christ lays hold of a man, the first thing he does is to give him significance.

He amounts to something, he gets a face. God gives the man a face and dwells in the man and he becomes transfigured in the fire. And the faceless man, touched by the mighty Christ, now takes on significance and meaning.

And the humblest new convert in the Baleen Valley among the Danis or Manis in New Guinea is more in the kingdom of God than the Churchills and all the rest of the great of the world, because they've taken on a meaning that they never had before and that nobody can have, except by the fire. Well, I was going to say, I'm watching that clock, that the fire protected this bush. I think I'll mention it just briefly.

No evil could bother that bush as long as that fire was in it. You ever think of the hungry goat browsing at twilight? He didn't go near that bush. He went over and browsed on another one, but he didn't go near that one.

And he buzzered lighting to look around. Never lighted on that one. There wasn't a bug that could crawl up it, nor a caterpillar that could lay an egg on it.

It was perfectly safe as long as the fire dwelled in it. Now, I believe in separation, but I don't believe in insulation. And I don't believe that it's the will of God that his evangelical believers, his children, should insulate themselves from others.

If you won't speak to a man, how can you speak to a man about the Lord? If we'd withdraw our holy skirts about us and wrap ourselves in cellophane and mark heaven on us and expect to get there finally when we pass customs, I wonder how we're going to help anybody all insulated like that. No, no. We are to be separated, but certainly we're not thus to be wrapped in cellophane.

Monasticism was a historical error. They said, I've got my fire, and now I'm going to have to cup it and keep it. So they cupped it and cupped their hand around it so the wind wouldn't blow it out, and they went to the monasteries.

It was a great mistake. I honor them for their intention, but it doesn't speak too much for their knowledge of the scriptures. Simeon Stylites was an example, and probably the most horrible example, of an effort to keep good by getting away from folks.

He got up on a pillar 30 feet high and stayed 30 years. There he was, and he never came down even to take a bath, never came down for anything. They fed him up there.

I'd let him, I'd have starved him down if I'd had it to do myself. But they got it up to him, and he pulled it up by a rope. He thought he was being holy.

The Son of God who walked among men, among publicans and sinners, and talked at the well to a fallen woman, he was holy and pure because the purity was inside of him. And so a Salvation Army lassie passing around war-tribes in a saloon is just as pure and just as safe from contamination as if she were somewhere in a convent. We do, in fact, pure.

We do not become safe by hiding. We become safe by the indwelling fire. I'm perfectly convinced that when God dwells in a human breast, nothing can harm that breast, nothing can harm that individual until God wants him in heaven.

I'm not much of a flyer, you know. I was born 30 years too early. But I have to fly.

I flew down yesterday. I flew out of what they call in Toronto a gray drizzle. It was goop to me.

We flew out of that. As I walked up the plane, I said, Now, Lord, I'm in your hands. It's either Chicago or glory, one or the other.

And I have every reason to believe that a man or a woman is perfectly safe while the fire of God's presence dwells in him. And then lastly, by the way, I'm going to get too early. It's unheard of in ministerial circles, but I'm going to do it.

Maybe this is the most important for us in our work, as believers, that Bush became beautiful in the fire. Moses, many years later, probably 80, probably 40, 35 years later, wrote, Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. And I wonder if Moses was not thinking of the beauty of God in that bush, that solemn, wonderful hour when he saw God and met God in the fire.

Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. You know, the old Greek philosophers, for all the fact they had no revelation, sometimes in their blindness they did blunder close to truth. And they believed that beauty was a part, somehow it was near God.

They believed that virtue, that somewhere there was a central virtue, that because we're intellectual, somewhere there was a central intellect, and they believed there was a central beauty somewhere. Well, Moses knew there was, and he said, Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. And here was an acacia bush that nobody would have brought home and planted in his yard.

It had no beauty, but now this one was beautiful because it was aglow. It was a bush burning, and so it was beautiful. The old hymn says, Stay, O beauty uncreated, ever ancient, ever new.

The beauty of God was there, and when Jesus came down to become man, his garments smelled of myrrh and aloes and acacia out of the ivory palaces. We just passed through another hectic Christmas period, but if you got past the lights and Santa Claus and the rest of it, you could see the beauty of Jesus and smell the fragrance, the aloes and myrrh and acacia from his holy garments. He has, though he was slain on a hill outside of Jerusalem, the fragrance of his life have made the world smell a bit better, this dirty world in which we are, because he was here.

Well, there is an attractiveness about true Christianity, and I don't mind telling you I'm not as happy a man as I ought to be. I don't want to be irresponsibly happy. I pray God will never allow me to become an irresponsible, happy, jingle-bell Christian.

I don't think we ought to be. I think we ought to take the weight and woe of the world and of the Church on our shoulders. We have to be miserable, sanctify your misery, and dedicate it to God and suffer through it.

One of the things I am miserable about part of the time is the unattractiveness of Christianity in our day. The tragedy of unlovely orthodoxy, of unbeautiful Christianity, is without doubt one of the major tragedies of the day. Now, I heard the talk last night given by Brother Bloxner, and he tipped us off and he would say things that we didn't believe, and I tried my best to find something that I couldn't, that I didn't agree with him on.

But he was talking, he gave us a brilliant summation of conditions all over the world. One reason I believe they exist is this, this mess we're in all over and missions everywhere, is that we have taken a decadent, degenerate brand of Christianity and we've transplanted it on foreign soil, and we believe that we're doing God's service. It doesn't make a man holy to cross the water, whether he goes over on the Queen Mary or whether he flies by a Boei Sea Jet.

He's just the same man when he gets over there as he was when he was here. You can put a donkey on an airplane and fly him to Germany and his ears will still wiggle, and you can put a holy man on a plane and when he gets over there he's neither less nor more holy than he was before. We in our society, the Christian Missionary Alliance, we do everything but bow down to missionaries.

They're sort of a Virgin Mary to us. We get on their knees to them. But I've been around on a mission board now for, oh, I forgot how many years, too many.

But I've been on a mission board and I know missionaries pretty well, and they're people, they're just the same as we are. And they will transplant and take with them over and under the same brand of Christianity they've known here. If they were brought up on cheap religious fiction, they'll soon be writing cheap religious fiction for the literate Natives, or Nationals, excuse me.

And if they sung bouncy choruses over here, they'll be writing bouncy choruses over there. And instead of having pure Christianity, God dwelling in a human breast, we'll have the unloved, lovely monstrosity of a Western Christianity transplanted on Eastern soil. I don't believe in it and I wouldn't give a dime to support that.

I believe the great tragedy of the hour is unattractive, unbeautiful, unlovely Christianity. And the saddest part of it all is that most people don't know how unbeautiful it is. They see the ugly thing that passes for evangelical Christianity today and think that's all there is, when actually what we want and ought to have is the beauty of the Lord our God in human breasts.

A winsome, magnetic Saint is worth 500 promoters and gadgeteers and religious engineers. Used to be, give a man a Bible and a songbook and turn him loose and you had an evangelistic campaign on your hands. Send a missionary over there with a Gillette razor blade to perform surgery and a pair of pliers to pull out teeth and you had a missionary.

And nowadays you've got to take a course in electronics to get through. It's a big, ugly, top-heavy thing and sometimes I wonder if it won't be the will of God to break the whole thing down and start over. But how will we start? We'll start with Saints, my brothers and sisters.

I believe in Saints. I've met the comics and I've met the promoters and I've met the founders, who puts his name on the front of the building so people know he founded it. I have met converted cowboys, not too

well converted, and converted Pugilists that all got converted but their fists.

I have met all kinds of weird Christians throughout the United States and Canada. But my heart is looking for Saints. I want to meet the people who are like the Lord Jesus Christ.

A good many years ago over in the state of Ohio, I heard an old gentleman, losing his sight, lecture. Now the odd thing about it is I don't know what he said. I don't remember what he said.

But all I remember is what he looked like. He looked like my conception of Jesus if Jesus had lived to be old. What a beautiful face.

I sat entranced by that beautiful face. But I don't remember too much of his sermons. That was Dr. Jonathan Goforth, the great Presbyterian missionary.

Later on I was preaching in Toronto and the newspapers came out and said, Dr. Jonathan Goforth has died. He will lie in state in such and such a church until the people pass by, by the hundreds and I imagine thousands upon thousands, to look at the face of the man who had looked like Jesus. He'd never written a great book.

I don't think he ever did. I've never seen it. He'd never painted a great picture.

He'd never founded anything particularly. But he had lived what he believed. And the fire glowed in the bush until Dr. Goforth's face told more than his tongue could tell.

And so they went past and looked down on that dead face. Not even death could take away the beauty of the Lord God that had been so long burning in that personality. That is what we need, my brothers and sisters, that is what we need.

And so to you, particularly to the young people going out into religious service, I would say this, you are called to be a burning bush. You are called to be a bush that has fire in it. This is the world's sundown, and there are men as Moses alone looking for somebody that looks like God, somebody that has fire in it.

A lonely man somewhere is looking your direction. And it's my conviction that unlovely Christianity has done more to turn more people away from Christ than all the liberalism in the world, though I'm not a liberal. I'm an evangelical.

If you strain it a little and stretch it and put a few footnotes around it, I'm even a fundamentalist. But I'd leave them an evangelical and an essentialist, a believer in historic Christianity, the faith of our fathers which is living still. And yet I believe that until evangelical Christianity gets through and meets God in the fire and gets God burning and glowing within it, we're going to have all these troubles and we're not going to solve them by conferences.

I'm sorry that I can't believe that we're going to solve them. You're going to do a lot here, and I'm for you. But you're not going to solve this one basic problem unless you solve it on your knees.

For it's not techniques to follow, methods to be followed, it's the man and his God, God and the man, the man in God and God in the man, the fire of the Holy Ghost burning in the breast of the man. Brothers and sisters, if the fire burns hot enough it'll burn through an awful lot of problems that you won't be able to solve in a thousand panel discussions. So now that's all for this morning, and may God help us as we go out from here to serving in his world that we may remember that the most important thing is that we should

have met God himself in living, vivid spiritual encounter.

Father, we pray that thou will be pleased to bless these words. Thou knowest how stupid we are, how our words fly about like birds around the chimney. O blessed Lord Jesus, take the words, at least the text, and carry it home to our hearts.

Put in us, we pray thee, a great longing after thee, a great overwhelming desire to know thee in living encounter by the Holy Ghost through the blood until all our self-confidence is gone and we rest in thee our God. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the eighth chapter of John's gospel, gospel according to John the eighth chapter, beginning with verse 31, John 8 31 and following, then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if he continue in my words then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. And they answered him, we be Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man. How says thou, ye shall be made free.

Jesus answered them, verily, verily I say unto you, whosoever committed sin is the servant of sin and the servant abideth not in the house forever but the son abideth.

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