

# The Devouring Fire

by Chuck Smith

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's presence and judgment, and how it can consume and destroy sinners, but also purify and transform believers.*

**Duration:** 33:18

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, Psalm 23:1, Psalm 27:1, Isaiah 33:14-15, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 21:1

**Topics:** "Character Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker explores the concept of being consumed or molded by the fiery trials we face in life. He references Isaiah 33:15, which describes the qualities of those who will dwell in safety and see the king in his beauty. The speaker also uses the analogy of a devastating fire in the Lake Hughes area to illustrate the power and inevitability of God's presence. He emphasizes that while some may perish in the fire, God's love for humanity is demonstrated through the sending of Jesus Christ to save us from destruction. The sermon concludes by highlighting the transformative and purifying nature of God's fire in our lives.

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## Transcript

Let's pray. Lord, how thankful we are for the help and the comfort that you give to us. And how, Lord, we can just commit our ways, our lives into your hands, put our trust in you, and know, Lord, that you will work in us your work of grace, truth, and love.

Blessed, we pray, Lord, the study of your word today. Lord, even right now, open up our hearts to receive and give us understanding, Lord, of your word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

You may be seated. Tonight, Pastor Skip will continue to lead us through the Bible. This week in Isaiah chapters 32 through 34.

So, I would encourage you to read them over, and then join tonight as we gather to study the word of God going through from Genesis to Revelation and learning what God's word has to say. This morning, we'd like to draw your attention to Isaiah chapter 33 and verse 14. Here, Isaiah declared, the sinners in Zion are afraid.

Fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings? Isaiah is writing concerning the reaction of the sinners and

the hypocrites in Jerusalem when they saw how that God had wiped out the Assyrian army that was besieging the city of Jerusalem. The city, I mean, the Assyrian army had been conquering the world.

The Lord had warned Judah not to go down to Egypt for help because Egypt would be destroyed by the Assyrians. And the Egyptians were destroyed by the Assyrians. All of the nations have been destroyed by the Assyrians.

And now the only one that hasn't been subdued by the Assyrian army is the city of Jerusalem. All of the other cities of Judah have been destroyed. But here is Jerusalem standing now against the might of the Assyrian army.

The men of Assyria have been chiding the men of Jerusalem. They had said, don't listen to your king Hezekiah who is telling you to just trust in the Lord. What other gods have been able to deliver their people from our might and from our power? What happened to the gods of these other nations? And don't you know that your God, Jehovah, sent us down here to take you as captives? And as they were chiding the children of Israel, Hezekiah said, don't answer them a word, just trust in the Lord.

For Isaiah had told Hezekiah that God was going to deliver them from the Assyrians. Isaiah had told him that they will not as much as shoot an arrow into the city. And so one night the angel of the Lord passed through the camp of the Assyrians and he killed 185,000 of their frontline troops.

The majority of the invading army, 185,000. In the morning when the men of Jerusalem awoke, looked out over the wall to see the Assyrian army. All they saw were the dead corpses lying there on the ground as the ones who were not killed fled back toward Assyria.

They saw what God's fire did to their enemies. And when they saw this mighty demonstration of God's power, fear filled the hearts of the sinners there in Jerusalem. The hypocrites were greatly afraid.

They were asking who among us can dwell in the midst of this devouring fire. It is interesting that when Isaiah was prophesying the destruction of the Assyrian army, speaking to the Assyrians in Isaiah 29 6, Isaiah said, you will be visited by the Jehovah of hosts with thunder, earthquake, a great noise, and with a storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire. They had been warned.

They were going to experience the devouring fire of God. And now that it's happened, the sinners there in Jerusalem are terrified. Who among us can dwell in the midst of this devouring fire? The work of God is often referred to in the scriptures as a fiery judgment or a work of fire.

God himself is spoken of in the symbol of fire. In Deuteronomy chapter 4 24, it says for Jehovah, your God is a consuming fire. He's a jealous God.

In Deuteronomy 9 3, understand this day that Jehovah, thy God is he which goes over before you as a consuming fire and he will destroy them and bring them down before thy face. So you will drive them out and destroy them quickly. As Jehovah has said unto you in Hebrews 12 29, it just is a very short scripture that says our God is a consuming fire.

In our text, he's referred to as a devouring fire. The presence of God has just annihilated 185,000 men in the Assyrian army. As I said, the Bible refers to the fiery judgments of God.

We remember how that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by the fire and brimstone that came from heaven. Peter speaks of a day in the future when the earth and the works in the earth will be burned up. Peter said, but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise.

The elements will melt with a fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are in shall be burned up. The great tribulation is marked by the fiery judgments of God.

There in Revelation chapter eight, as he speaks of the angels that are sounding their trumpets and there is the corresponding judgment upon the earth. He said the first angel sounded and there was followed after that hail and fire mingled with blood and they were cast upon the earth and the third part of the trees were burnt and all of the green grass was burnt and the second angel sounded and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea and the third part of the sea became blood. Hell is described as a place of fire and brimstone.

So using it as a symbol for God and the judgments of God, what can you say about fire? Well, first of all, fire is everywhere in our universe. Out there every star is a ball of burning fire. Our sun is a ball of burning fire throughout the whole universe.

We see fire manifested in the billions of stars that are out there. The scientists have a word called aromachesis and it is a word by which they describe the slow burning fire of nature. Aromachesis.

They tell us that it is everywhere. That slow burning fire of nature that is gradually consuming all that is material. The aromachesis.

Put a piece of metal out on the ground. Leave it there just for a few days and as you go to retrieve it you'll find that there are little specks of rust already developing. You say well that's oxidation.

Yes, the scientists call it aromachesis. The slow burning fire of nature. The other day I accidentally left a pair of pliers out in the yard where I was working on a project.

When I went back a few days later to retrieve the pliers already the steel was beginning to rust and little pits had developed as the slow burning fire the aromachesis began to destroy even that bit of steel that was left out in the open. So aromachesis. Everywhere.

The slow burning fire of nature. And so with God. The presence of God.

It's everywhere within the universe. We have a theological word called omnipresent which means that God is everywhere present at once within the whole universe. The warmth of his presence is a blessing to those that are in heaven but the heat of his presence is a torment to those that are in hell.

Isaiah said the sinners that were there in Zion or Jerusalem saw what the fire of God could do to the enemies of God and they became gripped with fear as were the hypocrites. Their question, who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? They saw what the fire of God could do to the enemies of God and they were terrified with the realization that they were sinners and they were hypocrites. Who of us can survive this fire? The word dwell translated dwell is the Hebrew word gore and there are several translations to this one Hebrew word.

It could be translated who of us can approach this devouring fire or who of us can dwell or abide in this devouring fire or it could be translated flee. Who of us can flee from this devouring fire? Which English word should be used to translate the Hebrew gore in this text? And as we read it we realize that all three translations would be correct. When you think of God who can escape, who can flee from God? If you think of God who can actually dwell there in the presence of God or thinking of God who actually can even approach the fire, the burning fire of God.

In the declaration our God is a consuming fire, we realize that fire is able to consume many things. Here in Southern California we've watched on TV as these forest fires have consumed vast amounts of forest territory. Kay and I drove up to the high school camp this week to be with the high school kids up there but again I was absolutely amazed at how much that fire burned a while back there in the San Bernardino mountains.

All of the way from the base of the hill up to the rim of the world highway. The whole hillside from highway 118 going up out of San Bernardino to highway 38 going up out of Redlands. All of the way is nothing but ashes.

You see charred trees standing there which was once a forest now all you see is just black trees stripped of their greenery and just there. And in places where the fire jumped the rim of the world highway and went on down the other side again just the vast devastation. We saw houses that were all that was left were the rock foundations and all as the fire consumed the whole hillside and so many houses and all in its path.

And you wonder who could dwell in the midst of that devouring fire and you realize that nothing could survive in that devouring fire. Thousands of people of course were forced to evacuate from their homes because of the threat of that fire. The hillsides have been denuded as a result of those terrible fires that raged there for many days.

But who can flee from the devouring fire? Who can flee from God? This past week there's been a major fire up in the Lake Hughes area. On one of the sections where the firefighters were trying to fight that fire they were withdrawn because the brush was so dry and the terrain was such that uh they said that the fire hitting this area could actually travel at the speed of a hundred miles an hour. And that if the firefighters were there there would be no way that they could run from or escape that fire.

So who of us can flee from the devouring fire? David said, where can I flee from your spirit? If I ascend into heaven you are there. If I descend into hell behold you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and I flee to the uttermost parts of the sea even there you surround me.

In other words David is recognizing there is no fleeing from God. There's no place that you can escape from God. So in reality you are in the fire.

So the question really isn't who can dwell or flee from the fire. But the question now becomes I am in the fire. What is the fire doing to me? Fire has the capacity to destroy.

It also has the capacity of purifying or transmitting into permanency. You take gold and put it in the fire. The dross is destroyed and you have the purifying of the gold through fire.

Same is true of silver. The purifying of the silver through fire. You take iron and put it in the fire and heat it up and you make steel developing this iron into a more permanent metal into the steel as a result of the

firing of the iron.

So there are certain things that are purified or made more permanent through the fire as there are things that are utterly changed by the fire. They say that no matter is destroyed but you change it into a different form and so the fires are able to consume so many things. And so with us Peter talks about the fiery trials that God sometimes puts us through.

Some people are destroyed through the fiery trial. Other people become stronger as the result of the fiery trials that we go through. The real issue of whether I'm destroyed or strengthened is what I am made of.

If I am trusting in my own abilities, in my own wisdom, in my own strength, I will find that the fiery trial will destroy me. But if I'm abiding in Jesus Christ and I have my faith and hope fully in him, then these fiery trials only make me stronger as I see how the Lord is able to work even through very trying situations in my life. We are told that one day when we stand before the Lord, our works are going to be judged by fire.

And as Paul said that he was sort of a master craftsman, he had laid a solid foundation which was Jesus Christ. The only true foundation that can be laid and men come and build on that foundation. But he said you need to be careful how you build on that foundation.

Some build gold, silver, precious stones, others, wood, hay, stubble. My works, they can be of gold, silver, precious stone, or my works can be of wood, hay, and stubble. But Paul said one day our works are going to be judged and many of the works will be burned up.

Those that were of wood, hay, and stubble, they will not last the fiery judgment. However, that which is of gold and silver and precious stones, that work will remain and I will be rewarded for that work. The others will just go up in that fiery judgment and there will be no reward.

As Jesus warned, be careful that you don't do your righteous deeds with the motive of men seeing you do them and thus applauding and praising you and going around saying oh do you know he is such a marvelous person. I saw him out there the other day and you know Jesus said be careful of the motives for what you do that you don't do them with the express purpose of having men see them so that they will applaud you and pour accolades upon you. Be careful about that.

For he said you then have your reward. Your reward is the praise and the acknowledgement of man. But he said do your works in secret.

Don't let your right hand know what your left hand's doing. Pray to your father which sees in secret. And that kind of work that is done just because I love God and I know he wants me to do it and I don't care if men know that I do it or not.

I don't know care if I get recognition from men or not. That's not my motive. My motive is just to please God and serve God.

Those are the works of gold silver and precious stones. Those are the works that I'll be rewarded for. Those that were done ostentatiously to receive glory and all for men there will be no heavenly reward for those works because they won't last the fire.

They're wood. They're hay. They are stubble.

So the real question of the sinners and the hypocrites there in Zion should not have been who among us can approach or dwell or flee from this fire. But their real question should have been I'm in the fire. What is the fire doing to me? Is it destroying me or is it transmitting me into permanency? Is it purifying me? And that's the question we should each be asking today of ourselves.

I'm in the presence of God. I can't escape the presence of God. Our God is a consuming fire.

That is he consumes all that is of the effete. All that it is of the flesh and yet that same fire is purifying and can purify and transmit you into a permanency. You remember Jesus said God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish, would not be destroyed.

You're in the fire. Some are perishing in the fire but God so loved you that he sent his son Jesus Christ that in the fire it won't destroy you. You won't perish but you will have everlasting life.

There will be that transforming, the taking out of the slag, the taking out of the dross and the purifying and the hardening into a permanency that God desires the fire, his fire to do in your life and in my life. I'm in the fire. Am I being consumed, destroyed, devoured or am I being molded and shaped into the image of Jesus Christ as a result of the fiery trials that I endure through his help and through his strength.

Who shall abide, who shall dwell? Well in verse 15 Isaiah answered, he that walks righteously, speaks uprightly, he that despises the gain that comes from oppressions, he that shaketh his hands or keeps his hands from the holding of bribes, he that stops his ears from hearing of evil and he that shuts his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high. His place of defense shall be the fortress of rocks, bread shall be given to him and water shall be sure for your eyes shall see the king in his beauty and they shall behold the land that is very far off, that is heaven. Your eyes will one day see the king in his beauty and you will be there to behold that land that is fairer than day that by faith we can see it afar.

So I'm in the fire, you're in the fire. What's it doing to your life? Is it bringing you closer to God? Is it transmitting you into permanency or is it devouring and gradually destroying your life? It's a question that we all of us need to contemplate this day. I'm in the fire, is it consuming me or is it transmitting me into permanency? It all depends on where I am in my relationship with Jesus Christ.

If I am in him, he's dwelling in me. It's only bringing me into that everlasting life, that permanency that God has for me in Christ Jesus. And one day I'll behold the king in his glory as I'm there in his presence.

The God of fire and I'll be warmed by that fire of God working in my life. Father we thank you that through Jesus Christ the fire of God is not something that we are fearing, not something that is terrifying us today knowing Lord that you've only purposed to change us into your image to mold us until we are like you. Thank you Lord for your fire that works in our life this day.

I pray father for those whose lives are being destroyed because they've built on wood hay and stubble. Their life is involved in the material things of this world which are all going to be destroyed one day in that fire and there's nothing of permanency in their lives. Father today may they surrender themselves to Jesus Christ and know the fire of your love, the passion of fire of your love burning inside them.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to pray for you today.

If in looking at your life, realizing that you can't escape from God, you can't flee, you're in the fire and if you see your life sort of being devoured, destroyed, you're not made up of the right elements, you need to surrender your life to Jesus Christ so that there need be no fear of the fire of God as it burns everywhere all around us. These men are here to pray for you that help you to come into a real relationship with God. We're not asking you to join the church.

We're not asking you to make a pledge of any kind to the church or to man. But we're just telling you, you can have a living relationship with the true and the living God. You can come into an intimate relationship with God.

You can know that you are saved. You can know and be assured that the fire is not destroying you, but is only purging the dross out of your life to make you permanent, a permanent inhabitant of the kingdom of God. And so that's what the invitation is all about, to know Jesus Christ and thus to be secured.

When this world on fire passes away, you'll know that you will remain because of the permanency that his love has brought into our lives. As soon as we're dismissed, we would encourage you come forward, meet with these men down here. They're here for the express purpose of ministering to you and praying for you, to help you not to have to fear the fire of God, but to rejoice in what God's love has done and is doing in your life.

May the Lord be with you, watch over, strengthen you, purify you, keep you, and may you come to know that love that God has for you in all of its fullness as you give him opportunity to manifest it to you. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee.

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