

A Woodpile or Fire

by Fred Tomlinson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of not just having the right words and activities in Christianity, but also igniting them with the fire of God's life. It contrasts the wood of human efforts and religious routines with the life-giving fire of God's presence. The speaker urges listeners to seek the Holy Spirit's power and assurance, highlighting the transformation that comes from encountering true godliness and receiving the holy fire into their hearts.

Scripture: Exodus 33:7, Jeremiah 6:14, 1 Corinthians 3:6, John 5:39, John 6:63, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Matthew 13:44, Psalm 139:23, Mark 9:24, John 10:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit Empowerment", "Transformation through God's Presence"

Description

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Transcript

So I'd like to just introduce myself. My name is Fred Tomlinson, and I am speaking to you from a Zoom gathering in Abbotsford, British Columbia. And if it turns out that you listen right through and you feel that God has blessed you, I'd be delighted if you'd like to leave a comment, or if you wanted to contact us a little more personally, I'd just like to tell you that we have an address here, which is quite simply mckenziefellowship.com. So [mckenziefellowship](http://mckenziefellowship.com), one word, mckenziefellowship.com. And my brother Peter will get any messages that go there.

Amen. So in last week's message, as we were together, I gave the title to that, that God gave me, and I believe it was a wood pile without ignition. And I'd like to enlarge on that a little bit.

Basically, I started out focused in and around the second epistle of Timothy. Well, I'm going to excuse myself and ease away from that for this occasion as I feel the Lord has spoken to me a little more from that thought that he put on my heart last time. There's a couple of verses of scripture that I have open here.

It's in 1 Corinthians chapter three. And Paul is, of course, talking to the church in Corinth. And he says things like this, in verse six of chapter three.

I have planted a palace water, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one, and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.

And so he continues on, verse 10 says, according to the grace of God, which is given unto me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, but another buildeth thereupon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall try every man's work what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire. Amen. In a strange way, the verses I've read to you are not directly linked to what I want to say.

Now, it's a strange thing to do. I don't think I've ever said anything like that before in my life. But the fact is, what Paul is referring to in particular, when he says that some people build on the foundation wood, hay, and stubble, and then he draws a contrast with gold, silver, and precious stones.

But I suppose it's particularly the word wood there in that section there where he mentions three things, wood, hay, and stubble. But I want to just start here by saying that the wood that he is referring to in that particular context in which he's speaking is really the stuff of human energy. It's the stuff of human plans.

It's the stuff of human skills. You know, it's even fleshly efforts to serve God. And I believe that each of those categories I've just mentioned fall under this heading here when he speaks about wood and hay and stubble for that matter.

But we're thinking of wood in particular, as you'll see. The point that he is making, which is very clear and very bold, is that where people build into their lives and through their lives, these kinds of things, in the final analysis, they will all amount to nothing. And he makes it very plain that all such things, all such activities, all that's been involved in one way or another in producing whatever it happens to be that could be included there, it will be consumed.

Ultimately, rather, it will be consumed. But my particular purpose in talking this morning is to draw a contrast from that, as you will see, I trust, if you stay with me. Some people have said about my speaking that I tend to put a number of things on the table and you have to stay with me for the duration for it all to sort of pull together.

I don't set out to do anything like that. Please excuse me. But the wood that is represented in my particular thought this morning is the wood of words and activities which are part and parcel of the Christian life and ministry.

In other words, as we would think of whatever these particular words are or whatever these particular activities are, we would readily recognize that, well, they are the kinds of things that are very much a part

of what we understand to be the Christian life and the Christian ministry. So involved in these activities, there would be, without any question, many God-fearing people, good people, sincere, professing believers in the gospel. It would include our reading of material.

Once again, don't forget my heading is that these are things, not just out there, the wood, hay and stubble in the world or in the broader fleshly sense, but within this parameter of what we would think of as being Christian life and ministry. And so there's the material that we read, the words that we read in that context. There's the, some people are quite addicted to daily devotions.

They've never really been part of my journey, but I know that there are many people who probably use them in place of the scriptures because they're easier to get along with, maybe. But anyway, people read them, and no doubt they've been an encouragement and blessing to many people. Other people read deeper material and commentaries, for example, on the Bible, and people are involved in Bible studies and listening to preachers.

And then there's the internet. But I'm thinking of all of these activities. I'm thinking of people who live disciplined, moral lives, or if you like, preachers with great reputations, preachers who are well-known, who've written books and so on.

But I'm suggesting that all of these activities, in my judgment, not everyone's gonna be happy with this, but all of these activities can be and can amount to being wood. In other words, then these people, these great preachers I've just mentioned and teachers and so on, it is conceivable that there are those who are great wood technicians, if you like. But if this is true, what I'm saying, that people, these kinds of people involved in these kinds of activities, which all seem to be the right kinds of things for Christians to do, when the final benediction is pronounced, the net result is that words have been spoken or acts have taken place.

I even know that there are some men who make a sport of sacred words of Scripture, and that becomes their focus and their activity. But my question is, but to what effect? What's the objective? Where does it all lead to in the end? Here's the point. Of course, we need the wood, if you like, these kinds of things I've mentioned.

But now, more particularly to my point, that kind of wood, without the ignition I spoke about in the last session, it doesn't matter how big a wood pile you're able to produce or put together. You can have a wonderful wood pile, but if there's no ignition involved in the process with them, you still freeze to death. And that's the kind of basis upon which I'm speaking to you.

And the huge problem that exists, I believe, very broadly in our evangelical circles is that it seems never to occur to people that just stacking an impressive pile of wood or information or these impressive activities, which all seem so right, can actually amount to little or nothing in the final analysis. You know, the whole point of Jesus coming into this world was not to build wood piles. He tells us himself why he come.

He said, I am come to impart life. I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. Not merely endless life, though it will be that, but God's own life.

I am come that you might have life. In essence, and I'm basing this on the broader teaching of the New Testament, in essence, he was basically saying, I have come that you might have my life, that you might have my life. I hope just at this point, you're beginning to see how the seemingly strange things I've been

saying in the last few minutes are beginning to make sense because we can be involved in all of the wordiness of Christianity and Christian doctrine and all of the activities that seem so noble and right for Christians to be engaged in.

But in the final analysis, there's something far higher and far greater and far more significant. It's the very reason that Jesus Christ came into this world. Jesus didn't say, I am come that you might have many books.

How about Christianity? He said, I am come that you might have life. He didn't even come to start a Christian religion. Words and actions without life lead men and women to a struggle.

And I know that there are very many people, I've met so many of them over the years and I have been one myself. People who are familiar with all the words and the teachings of the Bible, but they're left with a struggle. They're struggling.

Struggling to what? Struggling to live the kind of life that they are encouraged to believe they're to live. And you know, that really has another word to describe it. That's legalism.

And Jesus said this, and I think this puts it really into perspective now. He said, you search the scriptures, for in them, these are the most noble words in the world. The world has nothing spoken by any human being that even comes close to these words.

You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And these are they that testify of me. And now note what he goes on to say, and you will not come to me that you might have life.

Jesus again said, it's the spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life.

Jesus is hitting the nail right on the head here, I believe. This confirms, as Jesus says, these folk he's addressing won't come to him. He said, you will not come to me that you might have life.

Confirming that there's a category of people who have good words, great words, the best words. And yet, for whatever reason, they refuse to come to him or they don't understand that they need to come to him so that they might have life. Amen.

Using this sort of symbolism that I'm thinking of, wood without ignition is to speak of Christianity that's devoid of life. I don't know whether you've ever thought about this. And frankly, I think this is one of the big problems.

So many don't stop long enough to think about this, that you can have all the right words. One of our friends in England who's come to be with the Lord now once made a statement which is very profound. He said, many learn the words, few learn the song.

That's what we're talking about. You can be an expert with the words. You can be an expert preaching technician with the words.

But how many know the song? There is something distinct about these words, certainly because they're breathed by God, but the words are presented to lead us to him, that we might have his life within us. Amen. Why is it that so few seem to recognize this and recognize the disconnect between the words that they claim to believe, words which are in the Bible, words which in many cases are in their own song

books, and yet they're not experiencing the reality of them? I mean, there are many, many who sing, let's just say I'm very fond of Charles Wesley's hymns, to sing, my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed him.

And so, and yet I know this from my own experience and pastoral involvement, there are many people who've sung those words week in, week out, not the same hymn every week, I don't mean that, but they've sung the words repeatedly. And yet, at some stage in their journey, it becomes obvious that all of the time they've been doing that, there's been real demonic strongholds in their lives that have never been dealt with. They know the words, but they've never learned the song.

They've never understood what the words are intended for, and why Jesus really came. And in a natural world, we of course know the difference between a wood pile and a fire that's burning and burning and consuming wood. But it seems that in this area, there's just such a serious lack of sensitivity to think or such a lack of discernment to contemplate and face up to and deal with the incongruity of having all the right words at hand, and yet an inability to live the life that God intends us to know and to experience.

So much of the church sings of a life that they don't possess. They preach about it, they study it, they witness about it, but they know about it, but they really have never received it. You know, the Old Testament arrangement, the legal covenant of Judaism, they had a religion of words, you know.

It was a religion of words, it was a religion of sweat and trying to live up to the standard, and it was a religious experience of condemnation because no one ever made the mark and so on. To put it bluntly, I think this describes probably a very significant segment of the professing church today, and people are missing the full blessing of the new covenant. But sadly, they've never clued into the fact or they've never been told or taught the fact.

Reminds me of a section of scripture I've referenced many times over the years from Jeremiah chapter six, where God is speaking against the religious leaders of that day, and he says this, he said, you have healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying peace, peace, when there is no peace. I think that's very appropriate. We can say all the right things, but unless the spirit of God is involved in the process, they're just words, and they don't produce what God intends them to produce.

You know, when the fire comes, when the ignition takes place, when the sacred fire comes, let me put it that way, it doesn't improve the wood, nor does it consume the wood or destroy it as the wood from my passage in first Corinthians taught. That kind of wood, well, that's gonna be consumed in the final analysis. But all of this studying, all this reading, all these words that I referred to earlier, the sacred fire doesn't come with the intent of consuming it or destroying it, but it comes with the intent of illuminating it.

It comes to eclipses, to eclipse all of those things, all of those works, all of those words with his glory. It puts me in mind of that night on the backside of the desert when Moses was there. I won't pause to tell all the story.

It's a fascinating story, but there he is, probably thinking that God has totally written him off completely. But do you remember how we read in the text that while he was sitting there, he became aware of a bush that had burst into flame and it was blazing and illuminating, but it was not consumed. That's a wonderful picture of what we're talking about here on this occasion.

The Christian life is not a Christianized lifestyle. It's life, amen. I want you to take away from this that I'm saying, and I'm used to speaking a lot longer than I am just now, but this fire that we're talking about is not the product of more wood, and that's a mistake we make.

We tend to think we need more learning, we need to go more conferences, we listen to more preachers, ad nauseam. You need to be very careful how you broadly listen to speakers. We need to decide where we're hearing the word of God and discern what that really is and limit our intake, I think, in a very sensitive way before God.

But the issue is not that we need more wood. What we need is the fire of this holy life to be received ever more fully into our lives and into our experience. And let me help you, if I may, by saying that this holy fire, this holy life, is the product of hiding yourself in his presence.

Do you remember Joshua? He was Moses' servant, do you remember all the story? But he clearly recognized in Moses that Moses, he had a secret. Moses was the one who entered into the tent of meeting. You can read about this in Exodus 33.

It's an easy reference to remember, Exodus 33, 7-11. We talk about 7-11 quite commonly over here, don't we, in the stores. But in this passage, we're told, and it reads like this, so the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as he entered into this tent of meeting.

God spoke to him as a man speaks to his friend. And then he would return to the camp. But listen to this, this is the quotation.

But his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. Joshua had gone with Moses and evidently regularly went. There's another part of that text that if you read it, you'll see where all the other men, they stood at their own tent doors and watched as two men walked down the sort of tent streets of tent city in the wilderness.

Where were they going? They were going to this tent of meeting. And it was in that tent of meeting that Moses would commune with God. But Joshua went with him.

We've got every reason to believe that Joshua just sat there at the tent door, recognizing the sacredness and the awesomeness, at least in some degree, of what was going on inside. And when his colleague and mentor Moses left and went back to the tent, it was in his heart to just stay there and be there. I'm saying to you that the great secret of receiving and experiencing this holy life for which Jesus gave everything is to be received from God by and through the Holy Spirit himself coming and ministering into your heart.

And it's not by more reading. It's not by, this is not to say we shouldn't read or we shouldn't listen to sermon. I'm not saying that at all.

I'm saying we need to distinguish the things that differ. The words are one thing. The life is altogether another thing.

And it must be the life, the life of Christ that we give our hearts to and that we focus our whole attention to. And I'm saying to you that the secret of receiving this for us will involve this committed, devoted passion to come alone into the secret place with him. Amen.

You know, when you see the fire, this is my testimony, but when you see the fire, you know it. When you hear the fire, you know it. My wife and I saw the fire in some men in 1966 and we recognized it.

We couldn't have said all the things that I'm sharing now at that time, but we recognized that this was distinct. We'd been raised on the Bible and raised thousands of meetings. It was our lives.

We didn't have television or anything of the sort. Our lives were tied in with the local assembly and the various activities with the people there. And we were taught to read the Bible and study the Bible and memorize sections of the Bible.

This was our life. But when we saw the life as we saw it in those men, we recognized it. And listen, we abandoned everything that was our life at that time for it.

It reminds me of a story that Jesus told where someone found the precious pearl of great price in a field. And then the man who saw it there, he went home and got all of his money together and he bought the field so that he could have that pearl. He didn't steal it.

And that's what God put into our hearts, our whole lives and everything that we were focused on was completely transformed at that time. And we listened to the messages which were being preached. But let me just read what Paul says as he writes to the Thessalonians.

This is what we found in the men that I was talking about. Paul says to this church, he said, for our gospel, these are the words, our gospel came unto you, not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance. And then he goes on to say, as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

It's a wonderful thing. It's the most outstanding thing in my life. And I'm sure my wife would say amen to this and possibly many of you listening to me will say amen also.

But what a privilege it is if in the journey of our lives, we find our paths converge with men and women who are truly godly, who found the spiritual secret, who have received the holy fire into their hearts and their very lives manifested. And it's unmistakable. Amen.

And this is how Paul makes that very important distinction between mere words alone, even if they're the right words and words which were ministering life because the Holy Spirit was in the process. And for us, the scripture lit up and faith was quickened in our hearts and ignition took place. And we thank God for that.

And I'm asking you as I close here, I'm asking, will you receive this message? I don't know where you're at or what's going on in your life or in your circumstances, but will you receive this message with meekness and allow it to become engrafted into your heart? Another line of Charles Wesley goes like this, refining fire, go through my soul, illuminate the whole, scatter thy life through every part and sanctify the whole. I trust we'll meet again, maybe next week. I'd love to hear from you.

God bless you. I think someone's gonna pray now. Amen.

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