

# On Fire for Jesus

by Joe Brice

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of holy fire and enthusiasm in New Testament Christianity, and how it is the gift of the Spirit that brings flaming devotion to the surrendered heart.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:49, Acts 2:1, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 1:8, 2 Timothy 1:6, Revelation 2:1

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Passionate Discipleship"

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## Description

Joe Brice preaches about the importance of enthusiasm and passion in religion, contrasting the reserved nature often associated with piety to the fiery devotion seen in New Testament Christianity. He emphasizes how the early Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, were transformed into bold and zealous followers of Christ, willing to be seen as fools for the sake of the Gospel. Brice highlights the necessity of being ablaze with the love of Jesus, as it is this fervor that drives true discipleship and the mission of the Church. He challenges believers to move from formalism to fervor, from duty to devotion, and from cold obedience to passionate righteousness, echoing the apostolic zeal that was disciplined and used for the purpose of love in the world.

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## Transcript

The thought of flaming enthusiasm in religion arouses distrust in the modern mind as in the ancient. Enthusiasm is permitted in any other pursuit; in religion it is regarded as bad form. Enthusiasts in piety are either despised as unintelligent zealots, or tolerated as well-meaning fanatics. Reserve is the rule in religion; and there are established conventions settling what is proper and "what isn't done." And yet, New Testament Christianity is holy fire, having little in common with the decorum and ritualism which often beggars the name today.

The essential faith of the Pentecostal Church was a heart on fire with devotion to God and enthusiasm for His purposes in the world. It was this flame of sacred love, which distinguished the early Christian and was the secret of his success. The spread of the Faith in its earliest days, as Carlyle has shown us, had little or nothing to do with external organization.-"How did Christianity arise and spread among men? Was it by institutions, and establishments, and mechanical systems? No! It arose in the mystic deeps of a man's soul, and was spread by simple, altogether natural, and individual efforts. It flew like hallowed fire from heart to heart till all were purified and illumined by it."

"Men ablaze are invincible. Hell trembles when men kindle."

The company gathered in the Upper Room represented the most rigid religion in the world, and some of them belonged to its straightest sect. They were strict formalists; and never was formalism so frigid, never so icy as in the Judaism of their day. Jesus had loosened some of their fetters, but the prejudices and habits of years are not easily cast off. Then a sound from heaven like the rush of a gale - the sudden appearance of light, like tongues of flame and in a moment that company was transfigured by the sacred fire.

We know the result. Enthused by it, those men and women ultimately turned their world upside down. My old chief, Samuel Chadwick often said, "Men ablaze are invincible. Hell trembles when men kindle. The stronghold of Satan is invincible against everything but fire. The Church is powerless without the flame of the Holy Ghost. Destitute of fire, nothing else counts; possessed of fire, nothing else really matters. The one vital need is fire. Without the flame and fervor of the Holy Ghost, the Church will never accomplish its mission."

"I have no further desire except to love Jesus even unto folly."

In the power of this new enthusiasm, the disciples of Jesus went forth as burning and shining lights. The spirit of cold obedience was kindled into a passion for righteousness, and the slavish sense of duty burst into an eager flame of devotion. An all-pervasive zeal possessed them, a burning desire for God, and a yearning pity for mankind. Pentecost put passion, fervor, and abandon into their lives, not rant nor noise, but the white heat of holy enthusiasm. It made them heroic and absolutely dead to the opinions of men. It made them willing, even eager, to be counted fools or fanatics for Christ. It is the transition from formalism to fervor that marks the miracle of Pentecost in this aspect. "I have no further desire," said the Little Flower of Carmel, "except to love Jesus even unto folly." The Lord of love rejoiced to hear her say it. So few say it.

So many of His servants are cold and faint in their love for Him. Let it be remembered that truth without enthusiasm, morality without emotion, ritual without soul, were the things which Christ unsparingly condemned.-(Rev. 2:1-5). Moral and spiritual passion, are the essence of the religion of Jesus. "Our Lord delights to see us love-obsessed, carried away by this master-passion from the conventional to the unconventional, from ease-loving ways into the regions of peril, into extravagances that make people question our sanity, as His was questioned, and from tinkering at mending men to the revolutionary and divine business of saving them." Christ prefers us passionate to proper. He wants devotion rather than decorum. He prefers fanaticism to formalism. He longs to see us ablaze with a love that must sometimes overpass the lines of conventional churchmanship.

"Our Lord delights to see us love-obsessed."

The fervor of the apostles did not pass away in mere wasteful tumult; it was disciplined and used for Love's purpose in the world. It was ordered, but not by the conventions of churchmanship. There was a regular expression along certain lines, but it was never calculated. They might at any moment infringe the canons or break the conventions, and be carried away into some unprecedented enterprise or sacrifice for the Beloved. The only predictable thing about them was that they would keep blazing. This is the explanation of the intensity of apostolic enterprise. If we are asked why this fire is lacking from religion today, there is one answer: We have not the Spirit. Pentecostal enthusiasm is not of human kindling. It is not a zeal of the flesh. It is not an inspiration born of human desire. No man on earth has the love, which Jesus commands -unless it has been imparted to him. It is the gift of the Spirit. "God is my witness," said

Paul (Phil.1:8), "How I long for you all with a love that is not mine, but Christ loving in me." The Holy Spirit of Love is the fire; He sheds abroad God's own love in the surrendered heart. We cannot bring this flaming devotion into our nature by effort of will or meditation; it is the effectual expression of the indwelling Spirit; and on the human side, it is conditioned by willingness to become a love-slave in the cause of redemption.

"Let my name rot if only Christ be honored."

The human condition frightens us. We are not willing to face the charge of fanaticism. The love of reputation holds us. What a struggle Wesley had to shed the cultural superiority and clinging formalism of his churchmanship! Revivalism would imperil his reputation. There was a painful conflict before he "consented to become more vile." It is this process of becoming vile in the eyes of the world which keeps many from the Baptism of Fire. It is only as we are willing to lose our reputation at the impulse of consuming love, that the Spirit is granted, and as that great warrior of the Spirit, C. T. Studd said, " A lost reputation is the best degree for Christ's service. To raise living churches of souls among the destitute, to capture men from the devil's clutches, to snatch them from the jaws of hell, to enlist and train them for Jesus, to make them into an almighty army for God-this can only be accomplished by red-hot, unconventional, unfettered Holy Ghost religion, by reckless sacrifice and heroism in the foremost trenches. It is the hot, free heart, and not the balanced head, that knocks the devil out." A man has not begun to be worthy of the Spirit until he is able to say with Whitfield, " Let my name rot if only Christ be honored." The abandonment of love in the cause of redemption is the authentic mark of the Spirit-filled life, but it is costly.

Fenelon's inquiry is a word we should heed: "What would a king say to the subject, or a master to the servant, who was afraid of seeming over-zealous in his service, and was ashamed of being publicly known as faithful? How much rather will the King of Kings judge us who do the like? There is but one way of loving God, which knows no bargaining with Him, but accepts His every inspiration with a free and generous heart . . . He cannot suffer the cowardly souls which say to themselves 'Thus far will I go, but no further' . . . Woe to the timid, cowardly souls who are divided between God and the world! They will and they will not; they are torn asunder both by passion and remorse; they fear both the judgment of God and that of man; they are frightened of what is evil and ashamed of what is good."

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