

Rekindling Holy Fire

by Ralph Sexton

The sermon emphasizes the need for revival in our lives and in the church, and highlights the importance of intercession, conviction, confession, and humility in revival.

Duration: 40:48

Scripture: Genesis 22:6-7, Exodus 3:2-3, Exodus 9:23, Exodus 12:8, Exodus 13:21

Topics: "Holy Fire"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a powerful testimony of a man named Harold who was paralyzed but found joy and purpose in his life through his faith in God. Despite his physical limitations, Harold learned to use his shoulder to dial a phone and share the message of Jesus with others. The preacher emphasizes the importance of returning to the glory and power of God, rather than getting lost in religious rituals and divisions. He also discusses the concept of conviction, explaining that it is a genuine and deep sense of being out of alignment with God's holiness. The preacher concludes by reminding the audience that God is still on the throne and is able to deliver and provide for His people, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Transcript

Our theme that was chosen for us this year is rekindling holy fires. And if there's ever been a day in an hour that we need to pray that God would help us rekindle holy fires, it is the day and hour that we're living in. I come before you tonight with mixed emotions.

I'm happy and excited for this oasis I needed this week. I needed the messages of Monday and I needed the messages of this morning and already tonight in the music and to see my brothers and sisters in the Lord. Only God knows sometimes how bad you just need each other.

Just to have a few hours where there's enough in one place at one time for hell to be restrained and maybe for the first time in weeks you'd be able to take a breath all the way to your toenails because the families gather together. I thank God for Southside and I thank God for the oasis but I'm burdened over America. I'm burdened over the state of the church.

I brought with me two or three publications to the pulpit. There's a lady doctor on the radio that has more burden and concern over the nation than a lot of Baptist preachers that I know. She's nicknamed Dr. Laura.

She's a Jewish lady. She's not a Christian lady. Yet she says the society's crumbling, the home's coming apart and she says the reason it's happened is we left the Ten Commandments.

She's written a book on the Ten Commandments that is a building block to get our culture and our society back. I have a report here in my hand from Michael Melvid and I've been in a couple of conferences with Michael. He is the co-host of the sneak preview on PBS, critic for the New York Post, has his own radio show and back in February of this year at the Shavuot Institute for National Leadership, he brought a speech on saving childhood and here he is a Jewish writer and he's saying that we're in such a bad shape as a country.

We're in such horrible decline that we've actually lost the childhood from our own families. We've taken the innocence of our babies away. He's not a Baptist preacher.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that we're living in a post-Christian society. There used to be a day in an hour that the Independent Baptist Church could stand here at Southside and we could testify that we had the largest churches in America, the largest, fastest-growing Sunday schools. But all of a sudden across the country we're seeing that there are now more Muslims in America than there are Episcopalians.

We're seeing that there are more missionaries coming to America than we're sending missionaries out. We're seeing the decline of our society and our culture and our children. And we need a theme, rekindling holy fires, because we desperately need to rekindle some fires.

Our nation's in trouble. Our communities are in trouble. Our churches are in trouble.

And individual lives are in trouble. Fire is always a symbol of the presence of God. It's a symbol of the power of God.

Fire in the Bible is a type of the Holy Spirit. We use the phrase and we talk about revival fires or the fires of revival. You need to remember that fire is a very powerful element.

Fire actually needs no introduction. Fire submits no resumes. Fire goes and hires no publicist.

Fire does not go to the radio or the TV station and buy spots to announce that it is in town. Fire does not go to the newspaper and purchase a full-page ad. When fire shows up, fire announces itself.

If the back of this building behind the choir were to catch on fire and bright orange flames begin to lick through the wall and smoke begin to billow out of the top, you would not wait for me to announce to you that the building is on fire. Fire would have already announced its presence on the property and you would already be making your way to the exit. Notice the Word of God because fire is found in the Word of God.

Over and over we find it. In Genesis 19 and 24, we read fire from the Lord out of heaven. That was coming down on Sodom and on Gomorrah.

In Genesis chapter 22, verses 6 and 7, behold the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb? Isaac and Abraham are on Mount Moriah. In Exodus chapter 3 and verses 2 and 3, and the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed.

The powerful story of fire being an evidence of the presence of God and the burning bush. In Exodus chapter 9 and verse number 23, and the Lord sent thunder and hail and the fire ran along upon the

ground. The children of Israel were being held down in Egypt's land.

In Exodus chapter 12, that wonderful passage of Scripture that describes the Passover. In verse number 8, and they shall eat the flesh in the night, roast with fire. God said don't boil the lamb.

He said I don't want it in water. I want it to be roasted. I want the fire there to symbolize.

And He said if there's anything left after you've eaten, put it in the fire and allow it to be consumed. In Exodus 13 and 21, it says and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light. The children of Israel are now in the wilderness, a cloud by day and a fire by night.

In Exodus 19, we move to Mount Sinai and it says because the Lord descended upon it in fire. In Exodus 24 and 17, and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mount. As the Ten Commandments and the law is being given to humankind.

In verse 18, I like this part where it says and Moses went into the cloud. Most of us spend our lives and our ministries outside of the cloud. But if we can ever get in the cloud of God's divine presence, then we'll be able to stand in this godless age that we're living in.

47 of these 66 books in the Bible talk of fire in one form or another. And tonight as we gather here at Southside, we desperately need that fire of revival. I know I travel around and I hear the same stories.

Well, Brother Ralph, you have to be very careful talking about revival all the time. You need to be careful as a Baptist talking about the Holy Spirit. There can be wildfire and it can cause problems and it can upset the program.

Wildfire, emotionalism, fleshly exhibits. You see, all of those things we hear over and over again. But I'm going to tell you something, my friend, when God does show up in demonstration of power, some will be noticed because the fire of God is burning in their heart and in their life.

You cannot be on fire and it not show somewhere. Probably the biggest problem we have is we do not trust the keeper of the fire. Because what we're saying is, if I can't handle it, if I can't package it, if I can't control it, then I don't want it.

So what we're saying is we don't trust the keeper of the fire. You must always remember, ladies and gentlemen, that you did not start your own fire. When God found me and when God found you, I was on my way to an eternity without God.

I was not looking for God. I was not searching for God. I was going the opposite direction from God.

And for some marvelous, unexplainable reason, this holy God intersected my path, put up a roadblock of grace, lassoed me in love, and brought me to the Savior. And there is where the fire was put into my heart and life. I cannot start my own fire.

I can only provide the fuel for the fire. Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we have been dead so long, or at least motionless so long, that in my way of thinking, even a wildfire would be a blessing. If you have a wildfire, it at least lasts long enough to melt the ice.

Amen? Some of you go to churches on Sunday morning that if you brought a cow in the back door and let her down the aisle, she'd give popsicles before she got to the altar. Right? A little fire can melt the ice. A

you find out that there's been people spent time with God, sometimes for weeks and months in prayer, and sometimes for years.

And it wasn't who we thought it would be. Maybe a widow lady, maybe an invalid. There was a businessman in my church who owned an electrical company, a wonderful fellow, a hard worker, worked six days a week for years.

And I went by and saw him one day and he said, Brother Ralph, he said, I'm going to retire next week. I'm going to turn my contracting business over to my children. He said, we're going to go celebrate.

My wife and I never got to go on a honeymoon and we're going to go to Hawaii for a month. We're going to celebrate my retirement, we're going to celebrate our marriage, and we're going to leave out. And on the Friday before he was to work his last day, he was at one of the high schools and they were contracting to put in the lighting.

And one of the fellows was having a problem with a light and he just stampered up the ladder and was working about 32 feet off the floor. Something happened. He lost his footing and he fell back.

And when he fell, he hit on one of the big drills laying on the floor and broke his neck right above his shoulders. Paralyzed him from the shoulders down. Never to walk again.

Never to go on the trip. Never to go to Hawaii. Never to have that honeymoon, that vacation, that retirement.

The rest of his life he would be an invalid. I'd go by to see Harold and I just couldn't believe the problem. I couldn't believe it.

This great fellow. And he said, Brother Ralph, he said, I don't understand this. I don't know why I've had to go through this.

But he said, I just, I know this much God's so good to me. And I said, Harold? He said, but it's the truth. He said, Brother Ralph, since it's happened, my son's got saved.

My daughter's got saved. My family's right with God. He said, I just want to tell you how good God is to me.

He's laying there with his arms paralyzed, his legs paralyzed. My wife talked to me on the phone a few weeks after that. They were putting a feeding tube in, punctured his lung.

Food got into his lung. Infection set up. He almost died again.

I went by to see him and I went in there and he said, Brother Ralph, guess what they told me? He said, I'll never eat solid food again. He said, about the only thing I had left was I could enjoy solid food. But he said, I can't enjoy solid food anymore.

But he said, let me tell you, God's so good to me. He said, look what I've learned to do. And he took that paralyzed arm and he put his shoulder around it.

And when he did, he knocked the phone off. They had it on a phone mat. He said, I used to have to lay here.

But he said, now I've learned how to dial that push button phone by moving my shoulder. He said, I can call people and tell them about Jesus and how good he is to me. And I said, Harold, son, you're killing me.

He said, well, the good part is, Brother Ralph, he said, every night at 8 o'clock. He said, I know you're somewhere preaching. And he said, every night at 8 o'clock.

He said, I don't push that phone over. He said, but I go into the Holy of Holies and I knock on that door. And I tell them my preacher's preaching somewhere tonight.

And God would just cut him loose and preach him in the power of the Spirit and let the fire fall on him. Intercessory prayer is an evidence of the Spirit in the presence of God. I submit to you, if we're to survive into a new millennium, we must have the fire of this holy God.

This fire that we need afresh and anew, just like David had many anointings in his life. We need that fire of the Holy Ghost in our life to purge us and to purify us and to set our hearts on fire with a new love for a holy God. Revelation talks about that God said, I have somewhat against you.

You're neither hot nor cold. And the reason we're neither hot nor cold is because we've lost that fire that got us here. That old time Bible preaching and praying and praising the Lord is our heritage at Southwide.

That's the heritage of our generation, is that we love God and the things of God and the people of God. And we need to get back to that brokenness before Him. Only revival fire can make me what I need to be spiritually.

You say, well, Brother Ralph, can we have revival in the last days? Absolutely. You see, we forget that there's elements present in this place. We forget that there is a real God and a real devil.

You must always remember for everything that God has real, the devil has a counterfeit. He has an imitation. Jesus is the light of the world.

And we know that the devil works as an angel of light. There is salvation by grace plus nothing. And there is a world teaching salvation by works.

There is a genuine new birth experience. And there is the fact that millions are caught up in religious activity. You must always remember that there is a holy and an unholy.

You must remember there's God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. You must remember there's a devil, a beast, and a false prophet. The devil works as anti-God.

Beast works as anti-Christ. False prophet works as anti-Holy Ghost. That's a real world we're in.

There really are angels. And there really are demons. And demons work as anti-angels.

And there really is a true church. There is a blood-bought bride. There's a crowd that's in.

They're saved and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. And there's also a harlot look-alike church, a church of religion, a church of works, a church that has a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. That's how you can understand tonight the simple fact that in the middle of apostasy, in the organized religion, in the harlot church, in the middle of all that, there's a bride of Christ that can have revival.

You can have a walk with God. You can have power with God. You can have the presence of God.

In the middle of a world that's making fun of you, mocking you, laughing at you, mocking your Jesus, laughing at your walk with God, trying to take away the authority of the Word of God, in the middle of that apostasy, there can be a crowd living in the fire. I don't have to go home on memories. I don't have to go home reading about what God used to do.

I don't have to hang out in the smoke and smell how God used to be great. I don't have to hang around and say, Boy, we used to have meetings. We used to have revival.

We used to have the power of God. We used to have tears. We used to have a walk.

We used to have a talk. We used to be the people of God. No, sir, my friend, the God that I fell in love with, He's still on the throne, and He still owns the job for me and for you.

He's still delivering. He's still providing. Listen, five years ago this month, my precious wife got sick, chronically ill.

It changed our life. It changed our home. It's changed everything that we love to do.

All of a sudden, all your plans and your dreams, the kids are now grown and married, and we're going to be traveling together. We're going to do this, and we're going to do that. And all of a sudden, overnight, all that changes.

In the midst of her sickness and illness, all of a sudden this town that I've lived in begins to pass a new law last year, and says, we will define what a church is, what a church is not, what a church can do, and what a church cannot do. And I stood up to the city council meeting, and I said, you don't understand. You don't want to go here.

You don't understand. This isn't about land use. This isn't about zoning.

This has to do with you walking over at my church and telling me that I can't run a bus route anymore. That's not the proper land use. That I'm no longer compliant.

I can't have Trinity Baptist Bible College anymore. That's against the law. That the teen church is against the law.

That the Awana ministry is against the law. No sir, that's not the way it is. You don't want to go here because we will not submit to that for five seconds, let alone five minutes or five hours, because the church doesn't bow to anyone but a holy God.

I found out in the midst of the storm that you cannot survive if you don't have some fire from God. I found out that my feelings will take off and leave. I found out my emotions will pack up and leave out the back door when hail is coming in the front door.

Earlier this year, my daughter-in-law was having a baby at the hospital. We went up there to be with her and my wife had been in bed several days, very sick. And she said, Honey, are you going to go up to the hospital and be with the kids? I said, I sure am.

It's about two in the morning. She said, I want to go. I said, honey, you've just been too sick.

She said, no, I want to try. I said, all right, get dressed. I'll drive you up there.

We got up to the hospital and my daughter was coming up the hall and she was talking to one of the ladies in our church. She said, I went back and saw Lee and she's getting ready. Dad, she's going to have that baby any time.

I said, that's great, honey. She said, you know, I don't feel good. I said, what do you mean? She said, I just feel sick.

I feel like I'm going to faint and pass out. Two hours later, I had someone on every floor of that hospital in my family. I had my wife in the emergency room sick.

I had my daughter. They thought she had had a heart attack at age 31. I had my daughter-in-law having a baby.

It was such a bad day. My cat was even in the hospital. I don't even like cats.

The next day, while all that was going on, I received a page. And it was the office saying, you need to come to the church. The city of Asheville has pulled our grading permits and our building permits.

You see, the devil doesn't play fair. He doesn't wait for you having a good day. He comes against you when you are vulnerable.

And I was down in there and my daughter was so sick they couldn't find out what was wrong, whether they'd run one EKG and then they ran another one. When they found out, she hadn't even been sick, but it was a certain type of gallbladder attack. They ended up doing an emergency surgery.

I can't even remember the word the doctor used, but it was very rare. But it is very, very violent. And it is just, she was so deathly ill.

None of the classic symptoms were there. And they kept running tests. I remember along about 4 o'clock in the morning, I walked out the north door of the hospital.

I went out in the dark and I said, God, I am not complaining. I have nothing to complain about. I can't even figure out why you look my way.

But I'm telling you, if you're up there tonight and the lights are on, my wagon's full. And if you can do anything, I sure will appreciate it. I went back inside and the doctor was walking out and he said, remember, Sexton, there's something bad wrong with your daughter.

We can't figure this out. The EKG doesn't look good. It seemed like the more you pray, the darker it got.

About 5 o'clock, 5.30, somewhere in there, the sun hadn't come up yet. I felt like every weight in the world was sitting on my chest. I couldn't breathe.

And I walked out. This time, instead of going out the north door, I went out the emergency room door. And I walked out into the darkness.

And there's a big, long awning area for the ambulances to back under. And I walked out that doorway and stood out there in the dark for a minute and I said, God, I've been talking to you all night. I haven't heard a word.

I've tried to read Scripture over in the room. I can't find a verse. It doesn't seem like there's anybody at the house when I talk to you.

And God, I don't know if I can help anybody else tonight. I'm physically exhausted. It's been two days since I've been to bed.

I don't know if there's anything left. And God, there's people in there hurting. I need to help them.

I can't do anything. And God, for me to go on, you've got to help me. And I turned to walk in.

And all of a sudden, a bird started singing. That's not big to you. That's not big to anybody in this building.

But to me, it could not have been any greater if the Hallelujah Choir of Heaven hadn't stood up in the parking lot out of darkness and began to sing Handel's Messiah. It could not have been any greater. One little old bird.

And he was half asleep. Didn't want to sing. And he was squeaking out a song.

And I started to walk in, and God the Holy Spirit said, Did you hear that? And I said, What? He said, Listen. I stopped. He said, Listen.

A little bird is singing. And I said, What is that? And he said, That's a bird singing. I walked back around there.

Sure enough, there's a little old bird singing. And he said, Ralph, do you know why he's singing? I said, No, sir. He's stupid.

So I said, I don't even know. I can tell by his voice. He don't even want to sing.

He said, Do you know why he's singing? And it's still dark. I said, No, sir. He said, He knows something you don't know.

And I said, What? He said, He knows that the sun is coming up. And I said, What? He said, He knows that the sun's coming up. He knows.

He knows that at any moment, that old darkness is going to start fading away, and the sun's going to come up, and everything's going to be alright, because God's still on the throne. God's still in charge. And said, You just thought I wasn't watching tonight, but I've been watching over you.

Every step you took, I took with you. Every time you prayed, angels paid attention. Every time you called on me, they stood up around my throne and said, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty.

And that same God is available tonight for every believer that wants to walk in the fire and the Spirit of God. No Savior in this world can come close to what's been provided by us for all eternity. Houston paper said a few weeks ago there are 50 different people in the greater Houston area that say they're Jesus, the Messiah, but they're not the Savior of the world.

We've got a God that hears and answers prayer. You see, the evidence of God's fire and God's power is brokenness. The fire of God that will burn out everything in our hearts and lives.

That's unlike Jesus. Fire produces a focus on Jesus. Fire makes you so thirsty that you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Fire does something inside of you, not just a service with a touch. You're grateful when you get into those kinds of services where you can feel the presence of God and the power of God, but all of a sudden you start saying, God, I want to have it as a lifestyle. I want the fire on my heart and life every single day.

I want that walk with God. Jesus said, Carry ye in Jerusalem until that power comes upon you. It starts that process of growth and searching and praying and maturing.

Exodus 24, Moses told the elders, he said, You guys tarry for us here while we go on the mountain to get in the fire. You see, there used to be a lot of preaching, even in Baptist churches, that we had to have the power of God upon our lives. That we couldn't do it in the mechanics of our own organizations.

That we can't do it with the power of our degrees. You can have so many degrees, your mama calls you thermometer, but it won't put the power of God on you. What will put the power of God on you is spending time in the Holy of Holies, getting that old Bible down in the midst of the storm and begging God to read you a verse from another world that you can keep on going in the midst of the storm.

Every time I stand to preach, you know what I'm preaching on tonight? I'm preaching on the sweet saints of God that are tarrying for me. There's people that haven't eaten today because Ralph's going to preach tonight. I'm not even worthy to wash their feet.

And they've not eaten today because that preacher they love is going to preach tonight. And I'm preaching off their prayers and their time with God because somebody carries. Because we found out that there's no big eyes in little youth.

That God doesn't have big churches and little churches. God doesn't have big shots and little shots. God's just got a bunch of old sinners that have been saved by grace.

And we've been washed in the royal red blood of Calvary and our sins have been forgiven and we're in the battle for righteousness until He takes us home. What a difference that makes. You can have revival.

You can have the presence of God. You can be a different preacher. You can be a different Sunday school teacher.

You can be a different missionary. The good part is heaven's still open. God's still on the throne.

All He's looking for is somebody thirsty. Somebody that'll say, God, I'm so sick of me. I want You to break me.

I want You to mold me and to make me into what You want me to be. God's just not going to fill up a garbage can church. God's not going to hang around pride and ego.

The book says they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground. When the presence of God came, it brought humility. It brought brokenness.

It brought a tenderness. It brought a holy hush and a fear. They were afraid God would go away.

I'm telling you, if this crowd at South Y doesn't have revival, there's no hope for America. This is the crowd that knows about it. This is the crowd that knows about the presence of God and the power of God and the purpose of God and the plan of God.

What if God wants to send revival? Are we willing to confess our sin? Are we willing to go wash another brother's feet? Are you willing, if God wants to send it to the small church in your town or the big church in your town, are you willing to go help your brother fight the common enemy, the devil, and put the light out for the lost in the last days? If my people, verse 14, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and what? Pray. Listen, I don't know about you, but I want the fire of God back in my life. I want the anointing on my life.

I want to see God rekindle the work. I want Him to send revival. I want Him to take it out of South Wide and take it all across America.

Listen, the White House is not going to help us. Washington, the Congress is not going to help us. Your state legislature is not going to help you, but I'm going to tell you, God will help you.

God will do something for you tonight that you cannot do for yourself, Mom and Dad. Some of you are sitting here, your sons in the world, your daughters in the world, your grandsons in the world, your granddaughters in the world. Some of you preachers are sitting here, tales ripping your church apart, marriages are coming apart, and we're saying, what's going on? I'll tell you what's going on.

We got out of the fire. We got out of the glory. We got out of the power.

And we got lost in mechanics and isms and schisms. We got lost in our games, and we forgot the glory. Oh, tonight we need to get the glory back.

Would you do me a favor tonight in obedience to the Holy Spirit of God? Would you just bow your head quietly and reverently all over this building?

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