

The University of the Burning Bush

by Roger Ellsworth

The sermon teaches that God's sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and holy nature are revealed in the story of the burning bush, and that we can learn from these lessons to understand God's power and character.

Duration: 32:00

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Exodus 3:1-8, Exodus 3:14, Matthew 19:26

Topics: "Preparation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Moses and the burning bush from Exodus chapter three. He introduces the series called 'The Great Stories of the Bible' and expresses his excitement about exploring these stories. The sermon explores the lessons that can be learned from Moses' experience at the burning bush, including lessons about God, the people of God, and the Christ of God. The speaker emphasizes the relevance of these lessons for believers today and encourages the audience to apply them in their own lives.

Transcript

Thank you, Rebecca. Please find the book of Exodus, and tonight we're looking at the third chapter and the first eight verses as we continue this series that is occupying us during these summer Sunday evenings. And I'm talking about the series entitled The Great Stories of the Bible.

Now, you understand that there are more great stories in the Bible than I can possibly cover in one summer. Well, maybe the Lord willing, we'll continue this series next summer. My, there are so many great, great stories of the Bible.

And I'm finally out of the book of Genesis, and here we are in the middle of July. Well, you see, we could have stayed in the book of Genesis for this whole series, but now we're here in Exodus chapter 3, and the message tonight has the title, The University of the Burning Bush. The University of the Burning Bush.

And that's a different title than what we had listed in the church newsletter. It's my sermon, so I get to change the title, don't you think, if I want? When we sent the newsletter out, I selected this title, Made Inflammable by the Invisible. And you understand that title.

Here is a bush that, although it burned, was not consumed, and it was made inflammable by the invisible God. But as I thought about this passage some more, I thought that it would be better for us to look at it in

this particular way. And I'm asking you tonight to enroll with me in this university, The University of the Burning Bush.

Now, we know the story of Moses. We know how that Pharaoh had decreed that all the male children born to the Israelites would be put to death, but God in his sovereignty protected Moses, and not only protected him, but actually brought him right into Pharaoh's own house, and there he received the finest education that Egypt had to offer. And you're all familiar with the background for this passage that I'm about to read, and if you're not familiar with it, you can find it in the first two chapters of this book of Exodus.

You know that by this time, the people of Israel are in bondage in the land of Egypt, and they had been there for a very, very long time, over 400 years in bondage. And we just have to, I think, brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice in what these early chapters of the book of Exodus tell us about the sovereignty of our God, and we should be encouraged that God is at work, even when it appears that the situation is too difficult for God. We find it's not too difficult for him.

God says that nothing's impossible with him, and God is about to raise up this man Moses, and he's going to use Moses as his instrument to deliver the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. And that is, of course, the story of these first several chapters here in the book of Exodus. So I want to read these verses to you, and I'm talking about verses 1 through 8 of Exodus chapter 3. Now, Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

By the way, we also know Mount Horeb by another name. It's also known in the Bible as Mount Sinai. It's one and the same mount.

Verse 2, And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.

Yes, I think that's probably what any of us would have said if we had seen that bush burning and not being consumed. We would have said, I'm going to take a closer look at this. So in verse 4, When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses.

And he said, Here I am. Then he, that is God, said, Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet for the place where you stand is holy ground.

Moreover, he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.

So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. And that's a mouthful. Well, just a little bit more about the background here of Moses.

I've already told you that he was brought up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. You remember that she found him in this little ark that his mother had prepared for him. And she took him to be her own son.

And of course, in the grace and wisdom and sovereignty of God, God provided a nursemaid for this baby that Pharaoh's daughter had taken as her own. And the nursemaid was none other than Moses' own mother. And so we just have to admire how God works things out.

We're living in a terrible time, folks. It's a very threatening time in many respects. But I just hope tonight that you can go away from this service with confidence and comfort, knowing that God is still on the throne.

And when it looks as if everything that has been nailed down is coming loose, that God is still in control. And God is still working things out to the ends that he has in mind. Well, to follow the story of Moses a little farther, you remember that Moses grows up into adulthood.

And one day, he sees this Egyptian taskmaster beating one of the Israelite slaves. And Moses takes matters into his own hand, and he kills this Egyptian. And he's afraid that his killing of this Egyptian becomes known and that he himself is in danger.

And so he takes his leave of Egypt. And now we find him here in the third chapter of Exodus on the backside of the desert in Midian. And he had been serving as a shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro.

And he had been down here in Midian now for 40 years. And if you and I could just hurl ourselves back through time and find Moses before the account here in Exodus chapter three and just thrust a microphone in front of his face and say, Moses, how do you see the rest of your life turning out? I think Moses would probably have said, well, I'm going to be right here in this region of Midian taking care of these sheep for the rest of my life. And if you had followed that question up with this question, Moses, do you think God's got anything special in mind for you? Moses would have said, no, God doesn't have anything special in mind for me.

God is through with me. God has washed his hands of me. I can't help but think, brothers and sisters in Christ, that there's a message here in this passage for the Parkview family.

We may be looking at our situation this evening and saying, well, our day is over. Our time is over. We've been a small church now for a very long time.

God doesn't have any big plans for us. We're too small. We're too feeble.

We're too weak. And it's been this way now for such a long time. I've already told you that Moses was dead there in Midian for 40 long years.

And we must never give up on God, even though we have been in unpleasant circumstances for a very long time. We must always remember that we serve a God who can at any moment break into our circumstances and change things dramatically to the glory of his name and the good of his people. Now, one of the things I'm after here at Parkview is to get this church family to believe that God's still on the throne and God can break into our situation and God can do great things here.

I want you to know that God has not lost any of his power, that God has not diminished any in his wisdom or his grace. He's no less sovereign now than he was when he spoke to Moses on this long ago occasion. So I'm trying to encourage this church family, and I'm trying to get you to believe that God can step into our situation and do great things, even as he stepped into Moses' life and did great things.

But I need to pick up the thread of my sermon. I'm calling this the University of the Burning Bush, and what I mean by that is that even though Moses was trained in all the wisdom that Egypt had to offer, he still had not ever been to a university like this. He may very well have been to Pharaoh's university, but God enrolled him in a special university on this occasion, and he learned some things on this occasion that he desperately needed to know.

You and I know the rest of the story. We know that God raised Moses up, made him the deliverer of the people of Israel, and we know how that Moses led those people of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness, and how he was their leader for 40 more years before he himself was taken up into glory, and before Joshua came to the helm. I'm suggesting to you that God taught Moses here on this occasion through this burning bush some lessons that Moses very much needed to prepare him for what was lying ahead.

I'm suggesting that God taught Moses some lessons in this university that served Moses very well for the next 40 years of his life. I don't know tonight where you are in your walk with the Lord, but I just insist on believing that as we look at this Word of God tonight, and I've said before from this pulpit this is a living word. I mean by that that it has just as much application and relevance today as it did a hundred years ago, or a thousand years ago, or two thousand years ago.

Aren't you thankful for the Word of God? And I am saying to you that as we look into this living Word of God, we can find lessons from Moses' experience that will serve us well in the days that lie ahead of us. So that's the reason I'm asking you to enroll with me tonight in the University of the Burning Bush, and we're asking this question. What can we learn in this university? What does this university have to teach us? Well, one thing is this university teaches us about God, and another thing is it teaches us something about the people of God, and finally it teaches us something about the Christ of God, the Christ of God.

And you know what I said from the very beginning of this series, that there's a story behind the stories. All of these Old Testament stories have some connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, and we haven't really accurately understood them if we haven't found the Lord Jesus. So we want to spend a little time tonight in closing by looking at what this passage teaches us about the Lord Jesus.

But we begin tonight with this first thing. What does it teach us about God? What does it teach us about God? There is nothing that the church of Jesus Christ needs more today than instruction in the greatness of God. Instruction in the greatness of God.

Back years ago, I had a little paperback book come into my hands that I read and have treasured. I marked it up and put it on my shelf, and I still have it today and refer to it from time to time. It's written by an English scholar named J.B. Phillips, and the title of the book is Your God is Too Small.

Your God is too small. And I do believe that this is a danger to Parkview Church, that we can have a God that is too small. And this burning bush taught Moses that God is anything but small.

He's not small. He's a great God indeed. Well, what do we learn then about God as we look at Moses' experience here at this burning bush? Well, first of all, we learn about the sovereignty of God.

And I mean by that that God here shows his ability to override the laws of nature and to do something that is extraordinary. God's the one who put these laws in place. They're his laws.

And Moses finds out now that God can suspend the laws that he has put in place and do something that is unexpected, something that is exceptional. And that's what God... I mean, this didn't happen on every day, did it? Moses didn't see bushes burning every day and those same bushes not being consumed. This is out of the ordinary.

This is spectacular. And oh, how we should be yearning for God to do something extraordinary in our midst today. We must never lose sight of the fact that God can do the extraordinary, that God is not bound, that God is not limited.

And God proves that here. He comes down and he causes this bush to burn, and yet with the burning, the bush is not consumed. I think we also learn something here about the self-sufficiency of God.

And what I'm suggesting is that this is pictured for us by this bush. The bush was burned, was burning, but the bush was not used up. And that's the way it is with God.

God never depletes his resources in all that he does. He never depletes his wisdom. He never depletes his strength.

He is never diminished for all that he does. That's good to know, that God's just as powerful and just as wise and just as gracious on this night as he was on that occasion so long ago. Now, I know what it is to be depleted.

My strength gets depleted. And I don't mind saying that I'm usually more depleted on Sunday evening after I'm through here than I am any other day of the week. And on Sunday evening, Sylvia and I make our way to our home, and she usually feeds me something, and I collapse in bed, and there I am until my Yorkie-poo wakes me up the next morning.

And it's not maybe the grace of God that keeps Annie alive, but the pastor's grace, because she usually wakes me up pretty early, and if I wasn't a gracious fellow, I'd strangle her. And so I know what it is to have depleted strength. But God's never used up.

He's never used up. God's just as strong tonight, just as capable tonight, as he was when this bush burned here in front of Moses. And then we see something about the holy nature of God.

Now, I need to explain this a little bit. What we have here in this passage of Scripture is really a miracle within a miracle. And sometimes we don't see the second miracle here.

Well, the one miracle is obvious. This bush is burning, and yet it's not burned up. And of course, Moses says when he sees this, I've got to have a closer look at this.

And so he draws near, and we find as we examine this passage, look in verse 2, that the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. And so now we've got the second miracle. It's not only that the bush is burning, but it's also that this angel of the Lord is appearing in the bush.

Now, who is this angel of the Lord? Well, I will not take time to delve into this to a large extent, but let me simply say that many Bible commentators are convinced that when you come across this phrase, the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, and I have the New King James Version here, and it's interesting to me that in verse 2, the word angel is capitalized. And that is the attempt of the translator to suggest that this was deity, this angel of the Lord. He's not your typical angel.

He's not just your average run-of-the-mill angel. And most commentators suggest that every time you encounter this phrase, the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, you're really dealing with a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you know the Lord Jesus Christ was incarnate there at Bethlehem, that he came, he took our humanity.

But there were times in the Old Testament when he would appear in human form or appear as an angel, and it's the Lord Jesus many Bible commentators suggest that we're dealing with here when we come to this phrase, the angel of the Lord. And that's kind of thrilling, isn't it, to think about that possibility. Now, you may be saying, well, Moses didn't know anything about the Lord Jesus.

Oh, I beg to differ with that. I want to tell you that Moses knew about his father Abraham and he knew about the faith of Abraham. And even though his people had been down there in Egypt for 400 and some years, they had not completely lost sight of the coming Messiah.

I've been saying to you time after time after time that the people in the Old Testament were saved in the same way that we are, through faith in Jesus Christ. The only difference is their faith looked forward to Christ's coming and our faith looks backward to the Christ who has come. And so we have here an appearance of the Lord Jesus to Moses.

And my, how that must have thrilled the heart of Moses. Now, how much he understood, we cannot say. We do know that he had the promise of the Messiah, but I think that he may very well have understood far more than we think he did.

And the angel of the Lord speaks to him when he begins to draw near in verse five and says, and here's where we come to the point. I'm talking about what we can learn from God, learn about God from this experience. And I've talked about how we can learn about the sovereignty of God.

He can suspend his own laws. I've talked about how that we can learn about the self-sufficiency of God. He's never used up by all that he does.

And now I'm talking about how that we can learn about the holy nature of God. And as Moses draws near the angel of the Lord says, do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet for the place where you stand is holy ground.

Now, how holy is God that by touching the very dirt of the earth, he makes that holy? How holy is God? Oh, there's nothing that you and I need more to know about God than this. He's holy. And the Lord says, I have made the ground around this bush, holy by merely touching it.

And the slightest particle of dirt that clings to your sandals, Moses will contaminate this holy ground. So take off your shoes. You're standing on holy ground.

And I dare say that most people in Jackson tonight believe in God, but most people have no idea when they talk about God who they're dealing with. This is an awesome God. This is a holy God.

And most people have such a chummy view of God that they would never be able to understand something that we have here. Take off your shoes. You're standing on holy ground.

Our churches took a wrong turn back years ago when they began to worry about reverence and began equating reverence with formality. I've heard preacher after preacher stand in the pulpit and make fun of

reverence and equate reverence with deadness. And I want to tell you that if you have the slightest understanding of who God is, you'll not have any problem with reverence.

That's the natural response of the heart that stands in awe before the Lord God. And I hope that you and I here at Park View will never be ashamed of reverencing God. This is a holy God.

You may be right now saying, well, how can I? I know the truth about myself. How can I ever hope to stand in the presence of this holy God? I hope indeed tonight that you are saying that to yourself. And I've got good news for you.

There is a way that you can stand. Defiled, guilty, sinner that you are. There's a way that you can stand in the presence of this holy God.

That way is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth for the express purpose of dealing with the defilement of our sins. He took the penalty for the sins of those who believe so that we do not have to bear that penalty ourselves.

Thank God we can stand acceptably in the presence of this holy God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, Moses then was enrolled in this university of the burning bush and he learned about the nature of God and oh how much there is to learn about God and no matter how much you and I know there's always so much more to know and if you and I could pool all that we know about God we would be woefully inadequate in our understanding of the Lord. He's far greater than anything that we know and that all that we know.

But let me come here quickly to deal with a second thing and that is Moses also learned in this university something about the people of God. I can't help but think that as Moses stood there in front of that burning bush he could not help but think of the affliction of his people and God himself makes reference to this affliction. Look at verse 7. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt.

We often when we have difficulties come our way we often will refer to being in the furnace of affliction and these people were in a furnace of fire down there in Egypt the people of Israel and it must have seemed to those people yes God had made promises to these people but there they were in the midst of their affliction and I could well understand one Israelite saying to his fellow Israelite we're never going to get out of Egypt this furnace of affliction is going to consume us and now here Moses is and he gets the truth about the matter. He's standing here in front of this bush that burns and yet it's not consumed and I dare say that Moses realized as he was looking at that bush I dare say God was driving this truth home to his heart that even though my people are in the fire the fire is not going to consume them they're going to come out of the fire. That's a blessed truth isn't it? There are many of our brothers and sisters in Christ tonight as we gather in comfort here in this beautiful building there are many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around this world who are in a furnace of fire tonight.

I mean we have brothers and sisters in Christ in far-flung places that gather together with just a handful of believers and they are worried as they gather that they will be discovered and that the authorities will put them to death for gathering in the Lord's name. How blessed we are here in this country to be able to gather in the Lord's name and not worry about someone breaking the doors down and coming in and carrying us away and how ashamed we ought to be. How ashamed we ought to be that we take our privileges so much for granted and we take freedom of worship often to mean freedom not to worship.

God help us, God forgive us, but no matter what persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ are enduring tonight I want to tell you that the flame cannot consume them. The church of Jesus Christ often looks like she's going to be destroyed. The world has often thought that the church was going to come to an end.

The world has often showed up for the funeral of the church but every time the world shows up for the funeral of the church they find a disturbing fact. The corpse doesn't show up and I'll tell you why the furnace of affliction will never burn up the church. It's because the Lord Jesus said upon this rock I'll build my church and he was referring to himself.

Upon this rock I'll build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I don't know what lies ahead here in America. I only know that there is more animosity and more disdain and more contempt for Christianity in this country than at any time in her history.

I wonder what lies ahead but even if we have to face severe persecution here in our own country a lot of it will be due to our own carelessness and our own apathy but if we have to face persecution in this country we do not have to ever fear that the affliction will consume us because the Lord God is our security and the Lord God is never going to lose one of his children. When we get home to heaven we'll not hear the Lord saying I wonder whatever happened to so and so. You remember him so and so.

Is he around here somewhere? God won't ever have to ask that because not one of God's people will fail to get home. Well I want to just add this and then we're done. We're talking about what Moses learned here at the burning bush and I also suggested that he learned something here.

I've already told you that he was looking forward in faith to the coming Messiah and we see a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in these verses. I cannot help but think this. I see here in this in God stooping down to this lowly bush.

Here's just a shrub out on the backside of the desert and yet God stoops down to take that shrub and to use that for his glory and oh here's the Lord Jesus stooping down from his glory and taking our humanity just as God took that humble shrub. God the Lord God took our humanity when Jesus came to Bethlehem so long ago and here's another picture we see of the Lord Jesus. That bush was enveloped in fire but it was not consumed.

I just want to suggest to you that when the Lord Jesus Christ went to Calvary's cross that he was enveloped in the fire of God's wrath but he was not consumed by that and oh the wonderful proof of that is that on the third day the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the grave. So we can leave here tonight rejoicing that we have a God who is more than adequate for our days. He's a God who's more than adequate for our days.

We can leave here rejoicing tonight that this is a holy God and that we can stand acceptably in his presence through Christ and we can leave here tonight rejoicing that the trials and sufferings that come the way of the people of God will never consume those people. God will sustain them into his own eternal glory and we can rejoice this evening that we have in Jesus a savior who stooped down and stooped so low that he endured the fire of God's wrath but he was not consumed by that. He lives today to make intercession for us.

I hope you've been encouraged tonight as we have gone into the university of the burning bush. Let's bow together for prayer. Father thank you for this portion of your word.

Lord help your people.

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