

Fire From Heaven (Matt. iii. 11)

by Seth Rees

The sermon emphasizes the significance of fire as a symbol of God's presence and glory, and encourages listeners to receive the Holy Ghost fire by making a whole sacrifice and asking for it personally.

Scripture: Acts 2:3

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Purification"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the powerful symbolism of fire in the Bible, representing God's presence, glory, and purification. He emphasizes the need for the Holy Ghost fire to cleanse and purify believers, removing impurities and transforming hearts. Rees highlights the importance of making a wholehearted offering to God, free from human dependencies, in order to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He stresses the necessity of personal surrender and petitioning to God for the divine fire to fall, bringing about a supernatural transformation and conviction among skeptics.

Transcript

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire " (Matt. iii. 11, 12).

Fire is a divinely chosen symbol of God's presence and glory. back in the Old Dispensation, before Israel was released from the iron grip of Pharaoh, God revealed Himself to Moses by the symbolic fire burning in an unconsumed bush -- a striking type of the glowing, purging presence of Almighty God.

We see the type utilized again in the leading of Israel across the sandy stretches of the wilderness. However dark the night, however quiet the camp, the wakeful Israelite could quiet his nerves and allay his fears by simply going to his tent door and glancing out at the ever present pillar of fire.

Fire was closely connected with the offerings. The paschal Lamb was roasted with fire. The sin offering was carried without the camp and burned with fire. Even the peace offering and meat offering had fire connected with them, God evidently designing to reiterate and re-enforce the significance of a mighty symbol by frequent presentation. In the offering of incense in the holy place the sweet spices, ground and mixed and placed in the golden censer, were burned in order that the sweet fragrance might ascend up before the Lord.

There is abundant reason why fire should be selected by the divine typologist, for it is one of the most striking and powerful elements of the material world. It has always a strange, inexplicable mystery, and one never gets so wholly used to it that it ceases to be a frequent cause for wonder. Science has been baffled in attempting to explain the philosophy of the single flame, while the conflagration of the huge hotel or business block commands the respect and attention of men of all classes. Great crowds, with consternation and solemnity printed on their faces, watch at a safe distance the destruction of man's work by the dreaded enemy.

Fire has always been an object of superstitious regard among the heathen nations. In ancient Greece and Rome the sacred fire was most carefully guarded. Persons were appointed to the office of keeping the flames burning. Consecrated priests and vestal virgins took extreme care not to allow the holy light to depart from the altar. If by any catastrophe the fire was extinguished, all national affairs were suspended until it was rekindled, either, as some believed, by the lightning from heaven or by the concentrated rays from the sun, or by the sparks from friction. The foreign ambassador had to walk near holy fire before he could be admitted into the state council. The bride must bow before holy fire as she entered her new home. Sachem, the red Indian chief, walked three times around his campfire before he ventured to give counsel or receive a public visitor. The Persian fire worshippers looked upon the sun and flames as peculiarly sacred, and it was considered an unpardonable profanity to spit in the fire or commit any indecency in its presence. The Parsees of India worship the fire with veneration today.

Nothing in the physical universe is more valuable than fire. The sun, the center of our system is white hot, emitting flames, visible during eclipses, hundreds of miles long, and the appearance of sun spots is usually coetaneous with the unusual brilliance of the Aurora Borealis. Stored up in our vast coal mines and unearthed by the hand of industry, fire is the power that drives the wheels of commerce and propels the screws of navigation the world round.

The quick combustion of explosives is the prime factor in all the implements of modern warfare. It is seen in the terrible effect of the bomb, the Mauser bullet, the death dealing cannon.

Electricity, a form of fire, with its ever widening adaptation to nineteenth century life is revolutionizing all the methods of modern business and activity. There was a time when electricity was an object of mystery, uncertainty and dread. The lightnings of the sky were known to be real forces, but no one knew when or whom they would strike. None dared to attempt to control or utilize them. But Science has scaled the heavens since Franklin pulled the spark from the storm cloud with a kite and a tow string; and now a child can make use of this gigantic force with impunity. It is brought to the ends of our fingers and mingles in our everyday life without arousing curiosity and wonder. Electric fire rings our door bells, winds our clocks, grinds our coffee, lights, heats and propels our cars, carries our messages, plates our silver, and makes our pictures.

There was a time when the Holy Ghost fire was an object of mystery, striking only occasionally, leaping to Mt. Carmel's peak or to a bush before an astounded Moses on the backside of a desert. Again it appeared as a lamp and smoking furnace, then as a destroying flame in Israel's camp. But since Christ is glorified and Pentecost is fully come, the Holy Ghost is willing, yea, desires to dwell among us, without respect to creed or caste, upon certain plainly revealed conditions. When these are met fire will leap over the battlements of heaven, and not only illuminate and cleanse us but propel us along the highway of life.

One of the most evident effects of the work of fire is purification. Many things can be purified by the application of water, especially if the impurity is merely external, but it takes the powerful heat of fire to thoroughly cleanse anything in which the baser part is mixed all through that which needs purification. All precious metals are fired and fired again until they are made fit for use. Thus the inspired writer uses a most vivid figure to illustrate the radical and cleansing work of the Holy Ghost in his Pentecostal capacity. Just as the smelter of precious metals subjects them to the intense heat of the furnace, so, says the Scriptures, does the Lord of Heaven subject the heart of the believer to the cleansing process of "the furnace of the Upper Room."

"All is not gold that glitters " is a true adage applicable to many a disciple of Jesus. Not infrequently gold hunters are deceived by the shining of mica and iron pyrites, and there is much that sparkles and shines in the lives and characters of many professed Christians which is not the pure gold of perfect love for God and man. But the application of fire destroys the tin, and brass and reprobate silver. No doubt it is true that if all the alloy was destroyed from out of the hearts of some loud professors, there would be but little of anything left. The fire of the Spirit burns up all that is lightweight, chaffy, insubstantial. The desire for high reading disappears when a soul is subjected to the hot flames of Pentecost. One is then glad to read to the glory of God, and finds that his previous fondness for newspapers, etc., has gone from him forever.

The tendency toward light conversation and frivolous demeanor also leaves the soul under the fiery baptism with the Holy Ghost. Oh, the twaddle of these times! The gossip, the nonsensical talk! Pentecost destroys all this.

Another thing that Pentecost invariably brings about is a liberal and generous spirit. The impulses and feeling of fraternity which prompted the early church to have all things in common is infused into the modern followers of Jesus when thus experience is received, so that one is glad to share his last penny with his brother in distress. This fire burns the mortgages off of our churches and liquidates our ecclesiastical indebtedness with dispatch. A sanctified man and a stingy man are never the same person. To be sanctified implies liberality and openness of spirit.

There are whole districts where the moral atmosphere is laden with spiritual disease. Black, unhealthy bogs, gigantic swamp lands, infinite everglades, breathe a mist of fever, sickness and death. Whole churches are afflicted with "chills and fever," and not a few preachers are in the throes of typhus. What is the remedy? Fire from heaven!

When a boy I frequently watched my father free the well of "damps." He would fill an iron kettle with live, burning coals, and lower it into the well. Sometimes the impure gases would almost quench the fire, and the kettle had to be drawn up to the surface again for re-firing. But the fire always conquered at last. And there is no fever afflicted district, no spiritual bog, which the fire of the Spirit will not cleanse and make wholesome.

Fire is a powerful element in quickening and giving life. Man labors hard, builds a conservatory, erects his furnace and heating apparatus, and with great expense and pains raises a few flowers. But God swings the frozen, barren old earth around to the sun and lets out the contract of thawing the ice and frost, causing millions of seeds to spring into life and converting the arid desert into a beautiful garden. If God can work such natural miracles what can He not also do in the spiritual world? He can make cold hearts melt and soften, causing them to blossom as the rose. Oh, the genial warmth and glow of the Spirit of God. He quickens dead spirits into life. He who brooded over the waste waters of the early world

incubates dead souls into life today and brings them into a new existence.

The Holy Ghost is the divine life giver. He takes the preacher's sermons and infuses life and energy into them until they are messages of glorious fire and power. He puts new light in the eye of the church, a new flush in her cheek, a fresh strength in her system, so that with rapid pace she runs on the errands of God.

Fire is a mighty energizing force. God has created tremendous natural forces. He has stored up in the lightnings, and coal mines and tides and currents of air power enough to run the industries of the world. The same God has provided infinite might and energy in the baptism with the Spirit. Here there is ample provision made for the complete and satisfactory accomplishment of all the work of God. What folly to undertake to do divine work with human strength! What manufacturer would attempt to run his factory with a treadmill? And yet thousands of Christians are trying to do the Lord's work with their own puny hands. Science turns on natural power by the touching of a button. Shall not the children of God learn how to apply the lightnings of the skies to the complete performance of the Master's will in the world?

Archimedes defeated the enemy by burning the vessels in the harbor of Syracuse. With a burning glass, so the story goes, he focused the rays of the sun upon the ships and they went up in flames. All that we need is to bring the divine force to bear on the human need. Then we will see the fleets of the enemy turned into smoke and ashes, while the plans of our Adversary are utterly brought to nought.

When we have divine resources why should we depend upon human? We have a God to fight our battles, why should we fight them ourselves? It is a fact that all true work, work that amounts to anything, ceases when God is not the force in operation. Human activity and human effort do not count. After God withdraws the cause is a lost one. There is no need of our going on, even with greater noise and vehemence -- it is all to no purpose.

Holy fire is the only protection against wild fire and fanaticism. Moses' rod turned into a serpent swallowed the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians. The churches are full of fanatics - people who are foolish and blindly afraid of spirituality and thorough piety.

It is sometimes said by the ignorant and talkative that the preaching of holiness is conducive of fanaticism. On the contrary it is the greatest corrective of fanaticism. It is full "of love and a sound mind." The truly sanctified man is teachable, peaceable and easy to be entreated.

Holy fire is the only insurance against hell fire. When I was traveling in the Indian Territory one autumn, I was told that the greatest protection a man could have on those plains was a match -- that when the prairie fires broke out, the only safety was to start a "backfire" and burn a space over on which to stand. A place already ignited by the flame could not be hurt by a second. The Pentecostal baptism burns up all that is combustible and chaffy, leaving the heart safe from a second attack. Brother, take your choice, it is holiness or hell, holy fire or hell fire.

Just as the pillar of fire was light to Israel but darkness to the Egyptians, so the Holy Ghost is clear, white light to those who want the light but darkness to those who reject it. Two men may sit in the same pew and one be fed, helped and blessed by a sermon while the other scratches his head and says he 'does not understand it.' It is worse than Greek to him. The Spirit lights our pathway and confuses and perplexes our enemies.

On what condition will this celestial fire fall upon us? In answering this question let us turn to the experience of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Here we will find the conditions enunciated in a clear and unmistakable manner. The prophet called for Israel insisting that the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the grove should be present. The question as to the authority and divinity of the Lord Jehovah was to be settled. Elijah issued his challenge and prepared his offering. The God that answered by fire was to be conceded by all to be the true Deity.

It was a whole sacrifice. The bullock was a whole bullock And unless we make an entire offering of ourselves to God there can be no answering by fire. Any degree of mental reservation will mar the integrity of the offering and retard the falling of the holy flame. Many claim that they have put all on the altar, and yet have received no answer. Usually in such cases something has been kept back from the altar. God has promised to send the fire upon a whole offering. Let God be true, though it makes every man a liar. Those who pay the price get the fire. One can have all the salvation one really wants, and it is safe to say that all over the world people have just as much of God and His grace as they really want.

Elijah's offering was entirely separated from human dependencies. Especially care was taken to prevent any human intervention. No one must be allowed to say that by an ingenious combination of friction matches the sacrifice was ignited. The water of separation was poured on until everything was soaking wet; then all stepped back from the altar making it manifest that the appearance of fire was entirely extra human in its cause. And we must be all on the altar, free from human aid and help, entirely dependent upon God for the coming of the fire.

The sacrifice was definitely presented to God. Elijah stepped back, lifted his eyes to heaven, and transferred the whole affair to God. We must be definite in our asking and petitioning. It is God we are dealing with. We want him to accept us and baptize us with the Holy Ghost. We are not now giving ourselves to "the church" nor "the work," but to God Himself. He is to own us, control us, use us or let us lie idle as best suits His wisdom.

We must ask for ourselves personally. Use the pronouns "I" and "me," not "we" and "us." The latter are misty and foggy and indefinite, the former personal, particular, and prevailing in their effect. Bring your guns all to bear on Number One; do not scatter shot all over the country

When the fire fell it not only consumed the sacrifice, but destroyed prejudice and skepticism among the people. When the deluge of fire was seen the congregation fell upon its face with the admission, "The Lord, he is God." It takes supernatural demonstration of God's power to wring from the people an admission like this. The hostile multitude is all about us, scoffing at the Elijahs and making sport of God's prophets and workers. Legislation, laws, creeds, culture, money, machinery, none of these things will ever convince the world. God answering by fire can alone accomplish this blessed result.

We need fire to light our unlighted candles in pulpit and in pew. The fire of God in our universities and colleges would turn these centers of learning into centers of flaming revivals. Our schools would then, instead of spending so much time in stuffing heads and training heels, devote much attention to the melting and molding of hearts into Christlikeness. Instead of turning out moral cowards, blatant skeptics, and spider legged dudes and dandies, our institutions would give to the world at home and abroad a race of successful soul winners.

The last point of which we wish to speak is the suddenness of the fall of fire. It just leaped like lightning and fell upon the consecrated offering. No one gets sanctified gradually. The Lord comes suddenly into

His holy temple. While untold thousands stand and testify to having been sanctified, none profess to have grown into it or acquired it by degrees. In all cases the work is the work of a moment, for God is a great God and can do great things in an instant. Praise the Lord.

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