

Jesus in the Fire of God

by Steve Gallagher

Jesus preached in the fire of God, bringing about a change in people's hearts and exposing selfish motives and root out sinful attitudes.

Duration: 37:57

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2, Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 6:33, Luke 4:14-22

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the spirit and begins teaching in synagogues. He reads from the book of Isaiah, proclaiming that the spirit of the Lord is upon him to preach the gospel to the poor, release captives, restore sight to the blind, and set free the oppressed. The sermon highlights the impact of Jesus' words, which cut into the deepest recesses of people's hearts. The sermon then shifts to another passage where Jesus speaks about the need for good fruit and the coming wrath of God, which stirs the crowds, tax collectors, and Roman soldiers to ask what they should do to escape this wrath.

Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit EternalWeight.com. And tonight I want to take a look at the two final prophecies about the Messiah, the coming Messiah, which will be in Malachi 3 and Luke 3. And we'll probably spend some time in the Luke passage, but let's read this passage in Malachi first. It's a very profound word that he gave a few hundred years before Jesus came.

Chapter 3, verse 1. Behold, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. So this must be Jesus speaking through Malachi. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. Luke 3.16. And I'm going to go over this here in a few minutes, but he's been preaching for a while. And then all of a sudden he goes into this prophecy, really, that's about to be fulfilled.

John answered and said to them, All, as for me, I baptize you with water, but one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit

and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to thoroughly clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the shaft with unquenchable fire.

Okay, that's quite a word. The title of the message is Jesus in the Fire of God. And when we're talking about the fire of God, we're talking about a spiritual phenomenon that occurs when the Holy Spirit comes in a greater way and manifests His presence in a greater way to where people can feel and sense the presence of the Lord.

So that's what we're talking about. And I'm going to break this message down into three aspects of the fire of God that kind of coincide, not exactly, but sort of coincide with three periods of the Lord's dealings with the church. And they're reflected in these scriptures that we've just gone over.

The first one is the refiner's fire. That began during Jesus' ministry on this earth as He was walking around Palestine and so on. He gave a word that was penetrating, that had the power to penetrate people's hearts.

And it acted as a refiner's fire when He spoke. And the second happened after the resurrection as the church period began. And, of course, it was the day of Pentecost when Jesus baptized those 120 people who were waiting on Him in the upper room.

He baptized them with what? The Holy Spirit and fire. And then the third aspect of this fire of God is the unquenchable fire that John mentioned, which won't come in its entirety until the great separation after the second coming of Christ. So we'll get to those here in a minute.

Let's start off with the refiner's fire. Malachi predicted that the messenger was going to come first. And in the fourth chapter, actually the last two verses of that chapter, he calls Him Elijah.

And he says, Elijah will come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Now it's hard to imagine the great and terrible day of the Lord. You know, Jesus riding on a donkey, and He's sweet and full of love and so on.

But there was something that I think a lot of us miss in today's Christianity. There was an aspect to Jesus that was a terrible aspect, if I could put it that way. Not terrible like we think of terrible, like a bad thing, but full of terror.

And the reason I say that is because Jesus had a way when He spoke with people, there was a word that would go forth and deal with people's natures and so on. But let's look first at the messenger before we get in. I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

John 3.3, it says that John came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. And, you know, in other words, John had an anointing from the Holy Spirit, but it was different. It was a different kind of anointing.

His anointing was to bring people into a repentance that would culminate in water baptism for the forgiveness of past sins. It was kind of a symbolic act of cleansing away the sins of your past. And that was John's call.

That was the way that he was going to prepare the way for the Messiah who was going to come after him. He was kind of like coming in and just breaking up the fallow ground in Palestine in those days. You know,

I mean, I don't know if you understand exactly, but it's like a 10-mile walk from Jerusalem down into the Jordan Valley, and it is extremely hot, hot and dry there, you know.

And these people that were coming out to hear John, I mean, just imagine, they're walking 10 miles. It was down below. The Jordan Valley is like 1,000 feet below sea level.

And these people would make that long walk down there, and John was bringing forth a word that was affecting them. Look at verse 7. You know, these poor people have made this long walk. They're exhausted.

They're thirsty. They're wiped out. And, you know, John being the sensitive type he is and, you know, seeker sensitive, he starts off with, you know, the soft word, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? You know, I don't know how well John would do in America today, you know.

I'm not sure, but he had a way of getting right to the issues that he was dealing with. And he went on to, well, look, in verse 9 he said, Indeed, the axe is already laid at the root of the trees, so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Now, these are only the highlights, and we don't know all that was said that day.

But whatever was said, there was three groups of people represented there that day. There was the crowds. Then there was the tax gatherers, which represented more of the sinful element in Palestine.

And then there were the Roman soldiers. So there were these three groups of people, but they all said the same exact thing. What must we do? What should we do? Something had stirred them and terrified them about the coming wrath of God, and they were concerned, and what they wanted to do or know was, John, how do we change our behavior to escape the wrath that's coming? Well, you know, in other words, what was happening was John's message was bringing about outward changes of behavior.

But because we hadn't gotten to Calvary yet, and it wasn't Jesus, you know, his words weren't the same. They didn't have the power and the authority to go into people's hearts. Jesus, when he came, there was a different sense about his preaching.

In other words, he preached the same basic message, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He said the same words that John said, the exact same words, and I don't know what else he preached in those early days, but he was preaching the same kind of message, but there was something much different when Jesus preached than when John preached. When we're talking about a refiner's fire, we're talking about a white-hot furnace that was so hot that they could put big chunks of silver into it, and it would actually melt that silver, and all the dross would be separated off.

And that's a refiner's fire. It's white-hot. Jesus' words were white-hot to the soul.

They just had the power to cut to the quick and penetrate people's souls and expose selfish motives and root out sinful attitudes. Whether he was preaching to the crowds or interacting with individuals or debating with the Pharisees, whatever Jesus was doing, his words came with power. His words had the ability to cut into the deepest recesses of our hearts.

Now, if you just flip the page of your Bible over to the next chapter, we'll see an example of this right off the bat. Well, let's just read it here, starting with verse 14. Now, this is after he's been baptized and after he's gone through the temptation in the wilderness.

So he's undergone those things, and now he's being launched into ministry. And verse 14 shows us how it happens. And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding district.

And he began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as was his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him, and he opened the book and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all were speaking well of him and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from his lips. Now, you know, when Jesus starts talking about, you know, blessings for the poor and release for the captives and sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed, that's the kind of messages we like.

Lots of promise and positive preaching and all the great things God's going to do for us. We like to hear Jesus preach like that, don't we? We like those kind of messages where he's just telling us all the wonderful things he's going to do for us. And that is part of Christianity.

There's no doubt about that, you know, that there is a wonderful positive side to it. But Jesus preached in the fire of God. And he wasn't here to just bring a positive word to tickle ears.

Jesus was more concerned about people's hearts and their eternal destinies than he was about making them feel nice. So he didn't end his sermon right there. And when they were all talking well about him, you see that word all in verse 22 and 15.

In both of those passages, he was being praised by everyone. Everyone loved Jesus at this point. And this is the Jesus everyone loves in the church today.

When it's only a positive message, everybody likes a message like that. You know, what's to be upset about? But Jesus understood something about these people in Nazareth. He knew that they were holding on to a false concept of their relationship with the Father, with God.

It was all mercy. It doesn't seem very merciful when Jesus comes in and starts, you know, cutting deep with his scalpel. But it is all love and all mercy.

So he starts confronting them. He's going after that Jewish pride just because they were Abraham's sons. You know, they were descendants of Abraham that somehow that meant that they had an automatic end to heaven.

And Jesus is going after that false thing. And that's what he did all the time. I'm telling you, no matter if he was just talking to individuals or whoever he was speaking with, Jesus would just cut past all the nonsense and go right to the heart of the matter.

You can open up to any of the Gospels, anywhere he's talking, and it is the same thing every time. He's going right into the heart of the issues. And so he starts confronting them.

I'm not going to read it all, but he starts showing them how the Lord bypassed the people of Israel in favor of heathens, pagans, the dirty ones outside of Israel, the lady in Sidon and Naaman and so on. And you can see the reaction here in verse 28. And all, there's that word again, now all the people are thinking something different.

All the people in the synagogue were filled with gratitude because he loved them enough to share the truth with them. Right? No. No, they were filled with rage as they heard these things and they went on to try to kill him, but it wasn't Jesus' time to die.

He just was getting started. So he just somehow just passed through their midst. Jesus preached in the fire of God.

Every time he spoke, he was in the fire of God, meaning that his words had the power to go inside a person and work such a change and bring to light every dirty, filthy thing that was in there. Why? So that people could be freed. It's really what this was releasing the captives and bringing sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.

That's what his words were there to do. But, you know, we all have a heart and we're going to react to the words of Jesus, one way or the other, really. And, you know, it's the same fire that melts a candle but hardens a piece of clay.

It's not that the fire is different. It's not that the word is different. It's just that people are in different, you know, places in their hearts.

Some people just don't want the truth. They don't want the truth. They would prefer to be flattered and lied to than to hear the truth if it's going to make them uncomfortable.

Well, praise the Lord, Jesus is not afraid to hurt our feelings. He's the one with the eyes of the flame of fire and can see in our innermost being. And when he would deal with people, he had so much love that even if they hated him, he still loved them enough that he would bring the truth to them because he could see past this little time period on earth.

He could see past, he could see that great day of judgment when they would have to face the reality of who they were. They could skirt by now. They could avoid his dealings now.

They could ignore his words now. But the day would come they would have to face the music. It's no wonder that Malachi said, who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning? You know, there's something about Jesus.

How would you like to have him in your house? If he's the nicey Jesus that gives us everything we want and just kind of loves us and holds us and shows compassion when we're hurting. And that is Jesus. But there's another part to him.

There's another aspect to him. Alright, number two. Let's get to the second prediction about the coming Messiah.

And that was that he would baptize them in fire. He would baptize them in the Holy Spirit and fire, John said. And of course, we know the story in Acts.

I'm going to just read these verses real quick. When the day of Pentecost had come they were all gathered together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves and they rested on each one of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Alright, this is another example of Jesus coming in the fire of God. It was a little different.

You know, the fire of God, I said this, didn't I? The spiritual phenomenon that occurs when the Holy Spirit draws near. And that would occur in the Old Testament times. People experienced the fire of God but it was different in Old Testament times.

It was the Holy Spirit who unleashed the Holocaust upon Sodom and Gomorrah. That was the Holy Spirit. And it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to Moses through the burning bush.

And it was the Holy Spirit that consumed the mountaintop of Sinai. And it was the Holy Spirit that flashed forth that destroyed Nadab and Abihu. It was the Holy Spirit and it was the fire of God because the Holy Spirit's presence was strong during those different times.

But here it was different. The fire of God came differently in this setting because now it's on the other side of Calvary. Jesus the Messiah has been murdered and has hung on the cross and has taken the sins of the world and something is different now on planet Earth.

There is a completely different dynamics in the spiritual realm. So here the fire of God comes to these 120 people who are sitting in silence waiting on the Lord. All of a sudden God shows up.

And it's a mighty outpouring. But this time the fire of God goes into people. Instead of it being an outside phenomenon or whatever, the fire of God goes into people, into those 120 people, and there was a power unleashed in the spiritual realm that had never been experienced before that.

Something very dramatic happened on this earth the day of Pentecost. Something very powerful happened that day. We see the effects of it immediately.

Peter who was cowering and denying the Lord, just 40 days later the Holy Spirit comes upon him and he starts preaching fearlessly to this crowd of people. And whatever he said that day, they were so affected that they cried out, what do we need to do to avoid the wrath of God? And then he, of course, went on from there and he had a long history after that of preaching with a mighty fire and writing in the fire of God. But it wasn't just him, it was the other 120 as well.

Those people, something powerful happened inside them and they spent the rest of their lives living out that fire, burning themselves out for the cause of Christ. And it's been that way all through church history. There have been different times when God's presence would come in a greater way.

We've heard of the Great Awakening, the Second Awakening. We've heard of revivals. One example, I could grab so many, but one really wasn't a revival.

It was a group of people in England in the 1880s that began meeting together just for the purpose of seeking God. And it became known as the Keswick Convention. And F.B. Meyer and different ones would go there and minister and it became a gathering spot for people who were hungry for a real word from the Lord.

And there was a 19-year-old girl, her name was Amy, and she went to these meetings. She loved being in the presence of God. Well, you know, she was so affected by what happened at the Keswick Convention that she went over to India and spent the next 50 years living out her life trying to rescue temple prostitutes, young girls as young as six years old that were being turned into sex slaves and so on.

She spent the rest of her life, Amy Carmichael. But it all started back at the Keswick Convention where there were a group of hungry believers just hard after the Lord. And somehow, because of their determination to have the Lord in a real way, God's presence was manifested mightily, and it affected her and affected many other people.

The fire of God will burn the dross out of us, the ugly things that are buried deep in our hearts, just that poisonous self-life. The fire of God has the capacity, the ability to get in there and just purify that, just cleanse it out of there. And it has the power to establish a reverence and an awe for the Lord.

And it has the power to set a person on fire, not just a flash of emotion, you know, or enthusiasm that wears itself out after a week or two or a month or two, but something that can get into a person like Amy Carmichael or these 120, something that can get into a person and will just keep burning for year after year after year after year. That's what happens when you get affected by God, by the fire of God. But there's also another one.

John said, His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the shaft with unquenchable fire. This fire that's being spoken of here is a fire that separates. When God's Word comes forth powerfully, now let me put it this way.

When God's Word comes forth weakly and anemically, no one gets their feathers ruffled over that. Nothing is going to be said. I don't want to say it in the wrong way, but a lot of the radio preachers, I'm thinking of one in particular that I love to listen to.

He's a great teacher. But you never hear anything about this side of Christianity from him. You never hear a word that makes you want to fall on your face and repent and seek God or a word that exposes something in your heart that the Lord wants to get at.

You don't hear that kind of stuff. It's good, solid teaching. But when a minister is preaching in the fire of God, it has the power to separate.

I don't know how to explain it, but Jesus did it all the time. He would constantly separate the sincere from the insincere, the genuine from the false-hearted, because His Word would come in and it would cause people to go one way or the other. What I'm trying to do is establish something.

Here is how Jesus communicated. He communicated in the fire of God. Here we're looking at a separation.

That's what the winnowing fork is all about is separating the wheat from the chaff or the wheat from the tares. Now we all know the parable of the wheat and the tares, but I'm just going to read these three

verses here. Jesus would say later on, So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now I'll tell you, I don't know what the new modern commentators say.

I never read them. I always read the older ones, but they all are in agreement that the tares are false believers. They're hypocrites.

They're people in the church who just have a superficial level of Christianity and they've never let it really get down into their heart. They've never really had a heart change. They're like the people who listen to John's preaching.

There's an outward change in their behavior. They adopt the rules of the evangelical movement. Don't cuss.

Don't fornicate. Don't drink. Don't smoke.

All these things you're not allowed to do, but the things that are down in the heart that only the Holy Spirit sees, those are ignored and sidestepped. And Jesus knows who is who. And there is a great separation coming, you know, in the end of the age.

I want to just say this. I'm going to end here in just a second. I want to read a quote.

But I want to say this, that Jesus is lovely. You know, I love him with all my heart. I love him for all that he's done for me.

I love him for the way that he has rebuked me and confronted me at times and corrected me many times. I love him for all the times that he's shown compassion on me and just wrapped his loving arms around me. I love him for the way he has taken care of my wife and the way he has taken care of us in our lives.

I love him for the different things he's allowed me to do. I could go on and on and on for all the reasons I love Jesus. You know, but he is a lovely person in the sense that there is just none of that ugly self in him.

None. None. Just not even a shred.

But I never want to lose sight of the other side to Jesus. There was a girl who worked in a zoo in Cincinnati. This probably happened, I don't know how many years ago, seven years ago, ten years ago, something like that, probably ten years ago.

And she was a college student and, you know, I think she worked there in the summertime or something. And she had the job to feed the big cats. And, you know, what happens is when you're doing a job regularly, just day in and day out, you forget.

Like I worked in the L.A. County jail system for a time. And, you know, I was in there with murderers all the time. And you start to let your guard get down.

You get a little sloppy after a while because you get used to it. And she was that way. And one day she threw a chunk of meat in and a lion in an instant grabbed her by the hand or arm or something, got a hold

of her and ripped her arm out of her socket.

It's a reminder to me how suddenly the Lord can strike. He is love incarnate. He is.

But I never want to lose sight of that other side to Him that He is a consuming fire. That He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is not someone to be taken lightly and to be treated like a pal or something.

He is our God. He is our Creator. He is the judge that we will all stand before one day.

I'm going to read this Alexander McLaren quote to wrap it up here. Here we are, cold, foul, dark, dead. And there is that fire of God, able to cleanse, to enlighten, to give life.

For a Christian to be cold is sin. We sit frostbitten and almost dead among the snows. No evil is more marked among the Christian churches of this day than precisely the absence of the spirit of burning.

Alas, alas for the many thousands of professing Christians who are wrapping themselves in such thick folds of non-conducting material that that fiery energy can only play on the surface of their lives instead of searching them to the depths. Dear brethren, lay open your whole natures down to the very inmost roots, to the penetrating, searching, cleansing power of that spirit. And let us all say to Him, Search me, O God, and try me and see if there be any wicked way in me.

As I was praying about this message, I was thinking about just a couple of incidents that have happened. One was a pastor's daughter who I had dealings with for a time, Kathy and I. And she's a good girl, you know, just a lovable personality and so on. Her dad was a godly man and she kind of rode on his coattails spiritually.

And one day the Lord gave me a word for her. And I said to her, I said, You know, if you don't start allowing God to get past that superficial, happy-go-lucky personality and start dealing with you down in your heart, you're a nicey little church girl and that's all you are ever going to be. You are never going to know what it means to be a woman of God.

And it was the Lord. You know, it wasn't just like me trying to beat up on her or something. I know when God comes on me.

And that was a word for that girl. And I'm sorry to say, I never saw her really respond to it. I mean, she cried and stuff, but it just didn't go in.

She didn't let it go in. But I was thinking about a girl that one of these students that I dealt with some time back. And, you know, I kind of had some interactions with her.

And all of a sudden one morning I got up and I looked at my e-mails and I had a letter from her and she was pouring out her heart. And she was saying, I can't hold it in. I've got to bring this into the light.

And she just started sharing some nastiness that she had been involved in that she had not told anybody about. And she didn't know what to expect. You know, how was I going to react to hearing that? And she said later that she was really concerned that, like, I was going to rebuke her or something.

I don't know. Maybe she said something about, I'm sorry I, you know, laid such a thing on you or something. And I wrote her back.

And I said, sorry? I said, my heart is rejoicing this morning because you are allowing God to deal with your inner man. You are letting the Lord come in and get down into the depths of your being and set you free and burn some of that garbage out of you. Sorry? Are you kidding? This is just the greatest news I could hear.

Not that, you know, not that I wanted to hear about her sin, but the fact that she would just come clean like that and just, you know, throw down the guards and say the heck with it. I've got to be honest with someone. That's what the fire of God will do.

And you young girls, I'm going to say the same thing I said to that pastor's daughter. Please don't be satisfied with being nice church girls. God has so much more for you, but it will never happen unless you let him in to the depths of your hearts and really let him get after whatever may be in there.

And I have no idea what could be in your hearts. I just know what the human heart is like. All right, let's pray.

Jesus, I thank you that you do come in a fire. Lord, I'm so grateful. I know how you have purged so much poison out of me over the years, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

I thank you for it, Lord. I'll thank you the rest of my life. I'll thank you throughout eternity.

It wasn't enjoyable to get humbled and rebuked and corrected at times and so on, but, God, where would I be if I had avoided it and sidestepped it? I thank you for the work that you do inside of us, Lord. And I pray, God, that you will take this word, Lord, this little sermon here that I've shared tonight, and, God, that you will bring growth from it. Lord, you know how to use words.

You know how to disturb people's consciences. You know how to hound them, Holy Spirit. You know how to wake them up in the middle of the night and cause them to fear the name of the Lord.

You know how, God, to set people free, to make blind eyes seeing. You know how to take a nice church girl and to transform her into a woman of God, full of the Holy Ghost and fire. You know how to do that, Lord.

You're a master at it. And I thank you, Lord. I thank you.

I just love you tonight for the way that you deal with your people. And I just pray that you'll use this word, both here in these dear ones' hearts and lives and those who will listen later. We bring this all to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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