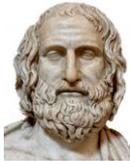


July 10, 2022 ~ Introduction

OPEN



"Waste not fresh tears over old griefs," said Euripides, the ancient Greek playwright. All too easily we can be weighed down by regrets from the past. Or we can turn our attention to the work which God wants to do within us right now and in the days to come. As an ancient Chinese proverb advises, "The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second-best time is now."

Today we begin a series to explore how we allow God to ignite our hearts through deeper and more meaningful engagement with Him. This series is called: "**Ignite: Learning to live ablaze for God**". Today I will borrow several thoughts from Wesley Duewel's book **Ablaze For God** (Zondervan, 1989).

We are so bound by our world of space and time that we have difficulty comprehending how wonderfully we are welcomed into the presence of God. It is because of Jesus, we are invited to come confidently into God's presence (Hebrews 4:14-16). Our sermons will explore several biblical characters to see how they encountered God as they journeyed with God. In some instances, we will examine conversations with God. Richard Foster writes,

Prayer changes things, people say. It also changes us. The latter goal is the more imperative. The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son. (*Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home*, 57)

DIG

ONE: Fire helps to communicate God to us

In this is an introductory message I want to first reflect on the way that the image of fire is used in Scripture to communicate God to us. There are many instances of God's way with humanity that includes fire. But let's consider three general ways in which metaphor communicates about God.

- **God's assurance of presence – Leviticus 9:5-7, 23-24**

Fire was always a component of worship in the presence of God when that worship involved a sacrifice upon an altar. The tabernacle/temple sacrifice was always consumed by the flames, and quite dramatically in some cases (e.g. Gideon; Elijah at Mt Carmel). God's presence was also expressed by the lampstand and altar of incense which burned daily (see Exodus 27:20-21; 30:7-8). God's presence was assured to Israel at the time of the Exodus as a pillar of fire, visible at night (Exodus 13:22).

- **God's activity of purifying – Job 23:10**

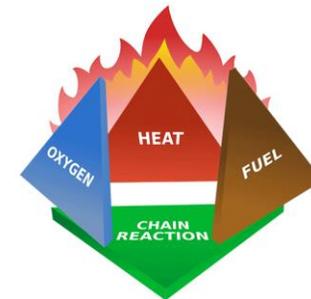
God is in the business of calling out His own – "to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:14). We have a powerful picture of the "fire" of God refining and purifying work in Job's suffering. What was his testimony? He understood that God's fire in his life was purposeful even though it was painful. "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10)

- **God's authority to punish – Hebrews 12:29**

The Scripture makes clear the reality of divine punishment. This occurred in specific circumstances in the OT. For example, when the Israelites complained about their wilderness hardships, God brought the punishment of fire to the camp (see Numbers 11:1-3). The place was named *Taberah*, which means "burning". In Revelation 20:14 we read of God's ultimate, eternal punishment – the "lake of fire."

TWO: Fire helps to connect us to God

Are you "on fire for God"? this is a very interesting question! What does it mean to be "on fire" or ablaze for God? Physical properties of fire are explained by the **Fire Tetrahedron** – four elements that exist in a fire are *oxygen, fuel, heat, chain reaction*."



[God's] holy flame, is for all of us believers...It is to make us beautiful in goldy personality, radiant in disposition, and fruitful in life.
~ Wesley Duewel

As we will see in our series, fire helps to express the way in which we are connected to God once we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ. Consider four features of fire as they illustrate our being “on fire for God” can be so much more than a Christian cliché.

- **Oxygen – consuming indwelling – Acts 1,2**

Pentecost Sunday (50 days after Passover) was June 5 (June 12 in eastern rite churches). According to Acts 2, the *defining* Pentecost celebration was when the Holy Spirit descended like tongues of fire. This was “*fiery characters of the Spirit’s operation upon the soul – searching, consuming, refining, sublimating [modify for the better].*” (Duewel, 23). This fulfilled John the baptizer’s prophecy that Jesus would provide a baptism “*with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*” (Matthew 3:11)



As fire cannot burn without oxygen, we cannot serve apart from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses.*” (Acts 1:4,8). The disciples were *credentialed* and *commissioned* but needed to be *consumed* by the Holy Spirit (Duewel, 9). Baptism by the Spirit occurs at salvation and His filling is a vital, ongoing reality (Ephesians 5:18).

- **Fuel – transforming encounter – Luke 24:32-35**

In Luke 24 we read the story of the disciples who returned to Emmaus. At first, they encountered Christ incognito. It was not until Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks that they recognized Him as Christ resurrected. What was their testimony? “*Were not our hearts burning within us?*” (v. 32). The encounter that they experienced with the truth of who Jesus is, in God’s divine plan, was transformative.

- **Heat – passionate zeal – Romans 12:11**

When a fire is raging and a building is totally engulfed it is described as “fully involved”. God desires that we be “fully involved”! He desires for our zeal to be real and passionate. In Romans 12:11 we read, “*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*” (ESV); “*Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master.*” (MSG)

- **Reaction – gifted service – II Timothy 1:6**

God desires to ignite our hearts to serve Him in greater ways than we ever thought possible. In II Timothy 1:6 Paul urged his ministry apprentice to “*fan into flame the gift of God.*” If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been gifted by the Holy Spirit. Have you discovered this gifting? Are you utilizing and growing in this gifting?

REFLECT

Joni Mitchell’s recorded her song melancholy song “[Both Sides Now](#)” in 1969 on her album *Clouds* (first recorded by Judy Collins in 1968). Mitchell wistfully croons about “*ice-cream castles in the air*” and concludes that she does not understand life or love any more than she comprehends the clouds.

Is that how you feel about your walk with God? Are you in that lukewarm spiritual space just as the church in Laodicea was? (see Revelation 3:15-16). There are many ways in which Satan attempts to extinguish our passion to follow God. What is the solution? Wesley Duewel reminds us,

A flickering flame that is almost gone can be fanned into brilliant fire again...God has created our spirits flammable. We are spiritually combustible. Our nature is created to be set ablaze by the Spirit. (19,25,26)

To ponder...

The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell.
~ William Booth

To pray...

*Father, forgive the cold love of the years / Here in the silence we bow
Perish our selfishness, perish our fears / Kindle us, kindle us now
Lord, we believe, we accept, we adore / Less that the lease though we be
Fire of love, burn in us evermore / Till we burn out for Thee*
~ Amy Carmichael