

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes sermons can be too long. A bishop spoke in Chapel at Yale University. He spoke for 15 minutes on how the Y in Yale stood for “Youth” then for another 15 minutes about how A stood for “Ambition,” the L stood for “Leadership” and the E stood for “Energy.” After an hour, everyone was bored to tears. As the Bishop finished his message, a student came and knelt in prayer at the altar. The Bishop was impressed and asked, “Son, what was it in my message that moved you so?” The student said, “Actually, I was just thanking God that this was not the Massachusetts Institute of Technology!”

Some sermons are like Tabasco sauce: they are fiery and give you heartburn. At the end of this message, I hope you’ll consider this to be a Tabasco message and I hope you DO have heartburn—but the good kind of burning heart. In this message about divine fire, I want to ask you: Are you fired up for Jesus?

Theologians have debated this question for centuries: Why did Jesus come to planet Earth? What was the purpose of the Incarnation? Jesus directly answers this question several times in the New Testament. For instance in John 10:10 Jesus said: “I have come that you might have life—and have it more abundantly.” Again in Luke 19:10 Jesus said, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” In Matthew 20:28 He said, “The Son of Man has come to give his life as a ransom for many.” You probably are aware of those scriptures. But did you know Jesus also said He came to bring *fire* on the earth? Read it for yourself in Luke 12:49-50. Jesus said, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!”

Even though we are only halfway through the book of Luke, Jesus is only a few short weeks away from the time when He will go to Jerusalem and be betrayed, arrested, tortured and crucified. There was a “fire” He brought to earth, and He was wishing this “fire” had already been ignited. But because it wasn’t yet kindled, He would have to endure a “baptism.” This would be a baptism of suffering. We use the word “baptism” in reference to water baptism—but the word means “to be immersed.” Jesus realized that in a few weeks He would be totally immersed in agonizing pain and torture, and the prospect of that suffering caused Him to be distressed.

The word “bring fire” is a word that means to “cast fire” or to “throw fire.” Jesus came to be a holy flamethrower! The fire He is speaking of is not literal fire but a spiritual fire. He is speaking of the burning, exciting, dynamic presence of God in the lives of people. I want to show you from scripture what this fire is and what it can do in your life.

### 1. GOD’S FIRE ILLUSTRATES HIS DAZZLING PRESENCE

In the scriptures, God sometimes revealed Himself through a physical representation; this is called a theophany. Fire is the most common theophany. There are several definitive statements about God in the Bible: God is Holy; God is Light; God is Love; God is Spirit. But this is a symbol of God. God is *not* fire—He is *like* fire—and He uses it to symbolize His awesome presence.

When God appeared to Moses He spoke out of the flame of a burning bush. Later, on Mt. Sinai, God appeared to all the Israelites as a fire on the mountain. Exodus 24:17 says, “To the Israelites, the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire.” What a sight that must have been! There is something awesome and scary about fire, no wonder God chose that theophany. Later, when Moses built the Tabernacle, they made the first sacrifice in the Holy of Holies. God again revealed Himself by fire. Leviticus 9:24 says, “Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering ... And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face-down.”

Years later, the prophet Elijah stood on Mt. Carmel and called on God to send down fire and God showed up and burned up the sacrifice. When the Apostle John had a vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1, he described Him as having eyes like a blazing fire. Throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, God’s presence is represented by fire.

That’s what Jesus is talking about, bringing the supernatural, burning, exciting presence of God Almighty down into our lives. Micah and Zechariah also picture God as fire, but the clearest explanation of what Jesus is talking about is found in the New Testament. When John the Baptist was asked if he was the Messiah he replied, “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3:16) Jesus came to totally immerse people in the burning, purifying, awesome presence of God. That’s why He came to bring fire on the earth. When you have a personal encounter with the God of the Universe, it’s like an experience with Holy Fire. On the first Easter, those two disciples walked with the resurrection Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They didn’t recognize that it was Jesus because they were certain He was dead and buried. After Jesus revealed Himself and disappeared they said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us?” (Luke 24:32)

When your heart is on fire for someone; that means you are passionate about that person. Jesus came to give us that kind of burning, passionate, love relationship with the God of the Universe. If God is like fire, there are several things He wants to do in your life that can be compared to fire.

## **2. GOD’S FIRE GENERATES UNLIMITED POWER**

There is a scientific field called Thermodynamics. It deals with the relationship between heat and mechanical energy and the process of changing one into the other. Your car has an internal combustion engine that burns fuel and changes it into the motion that pushes the pistons, and turns the drive shaft which turns the wheels which lets you get to from point A to point B. Electricity is produced in plants that use gas, coal, or a nuclear to transform heat into power. When you plug in an appliance in your home, that electrical current again is transformed back into some kind of energy.

I want to introduce a new concept to you. I call it Spiritual Thermodynamics. Jesus said in Acts 1:8 “You will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” The Holy Spirit living in you is like the fire of God that generates the power you need to live the Christian life. He gives

you power to share your faith or to forgive people who have hurt you, or to love unlovely people. In your own strength you *can't* live the Christian life. Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” (John 5:5) But the fire of God in your heart will be like a spark that generates the energy you need to live the Christian life. John says we have an “unction” from the Holy Spirit. The key to Spiritual Thermodynamics is: You can't function without the unction!

Fire will only keep burning as long as it has fuel and oxygen, but when it runs out of either, it will go out. Now, God is eternal, but the power He provides us is not something we can just take for granted as always being there. We must tend the fire in order to keep it burning. There's a great lesson we can learn from the fire on the altar of the temple. God gave these instructions in Leviticus 6:12: “The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire.”

If you don't tend a fire, it will simply burn itself out. The sad thing is, this can also happen spiritually. At the this point, I want you to stop for a moment as you ask yourself a very important question:

### **PAUSE FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION: HAS THE FIRE GONE OUT IN MY HEART?**

Was there ever a time when you were more excited and fired up about the Lord than you are now? Has your zeal and passion for Christ cooled down? During the 1960s and 1970s being “cool” was a good thing. In the old television show, “Happy Days”, there was a character named Fonzie, who was the epitome of “cool.” Everybody wanted to be cool. To be cool, you had to look disinterested. You never got excited. You never really became passionate about anything. You never got in a hurry. You always kept one hand in your jeans and looked bored most of the time. You were just ... cool, man.

The problem is we have too many “cool Christians.” Paul said that he was a fool for Christ—and we're trying to be *cool* instead of a *fool* for Christ. We have replaced the fiery, dynamic Christian life for some kind of dispassionate, mediocre substitute.

The Apostle Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 5:19. “Don't put out the Spirit's fire.” Have you done that? Spiritual fervor and fire can be extinguished by simple apathy. That's why God told the priests it was a daily discipline to keep adding wood to the fire to keep it burning. If you neglect prayer, Bible Study, your quiet time, or regular fellowship with other Christians, the fire will go out. You don't lose your salvation; you lose the *joy* of your salvation. You lose your zeal, your edge and your fervor.

Has your fire gone out? I heard about a preacher who served a little church. On winter Sunday, he arrived early and turned off the gas pilot light and the gas supply for the church furnace. But he turned on the furnace fan. When the people arrived they could hear the swish of the fan, but the building was cold. The title of his sermon that day was, “The Blower's still Blowing, but the Fire's Gone out!” That's an accurate description of thousands of Christians. You are still going to church, serving, singing and giving—but the fire has gone out.

I heard of another pastor who had been at a small church for three years. He met a man on the street one day and introduced himself. The man said, “Oh, I’m a member of your church.” The pastor was polite and said, “Well, I’ve been there three years, and I don’t think I’ve ever see you attend a worship service.” The man replied, “I said I was a member, not a fanatic!”

Many people are more concerned with not being called fanatic than in getting on fire for Jesus. We’ve all seen some Christians who get so excited they began to do all kinds of weird and strange things—and we don’t want anything to do with that—so we set the spiritual thermostat so low in our hearts that instead of being God’s Chosen we have become God’s Frozen! We are so afraid of wildfire, we have chosen *no* fire.

Leonard Ravenhill was an English preacher who moved to America and ended up living and dying in Lindale nearby. I’ve said before he is the closest thing to a 20th century prophet I knew anything about. He wrote: “You may belittle experiences and speak of the dangers of emotion, but we are suffering from a species of Christianity as dry as dust, as cold as ice, as pale as a corpse, and as dead as King Tut. We are suffering not from a lack of correct heads—but from a lack of consumed hearts.”

Vance Havner wrote: “Just because some have gone into a wildfire with rolling in the hay and foaming at the mouth, that doesn’t mean that the rest of us have to live in a deep freeze! God never intended His church to be a refrigerator to preserve perishable piety—it must be a place where God’s fire falls and His people are ignited for service.”

Place your hand over your heart right now. Has the fire gone out? If it has, this is God’s way of telling you it is time to re-ignite your zeal and fervor for Him. Jesus came to bring fire on the earth; has that fire been kindled in your heart? Are you keeping it blazing? Next:

### **3. GOD’S POWER ELIMINATES OUR IMPURE QUALITIES**

The Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts to make us holy. That’s why He’s called the Holy Spirit. To be holy means to be pure and clean. The Bible says in Malachi 3:2-3: “For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.” When God’s fire is burning in your heart, it will remove all the dross and impurities that find their way into your life.

In 1665 the residents of London were dying by the thousands each day. The bubonic plague was spreading from house to house because of the unsanitary conditions. Rats and fleas spread the germs throughout the city. Almost 30,000 people died, almost a third of London’s population at the time. In fact, the nursery rhyme we all sang comes from that period of time and actually described the symptoms of the Black Death. “Ring around the roses;” (The first symptom was the appearance of a ring of red sores.) “Pocket full of posies,” (it was believed that carrying posies and holding them under your nose would protect you); “tishu, tishu” (the sound of sneezing was an early symptom) “we all fall down.” (the infected person dies) This plague was so bad experts surmise the entire population of London would have died if it had not been checked. But on September 2, 1666, the Great Fire of London broke out and burned uncontrollably for five days. Most of the structures in Medieval London were wooden, and

almost the entire city was reduced to ashes. But when the fire finally died, the people soon discovered many of the rats and fleas had been killed in the fire and the epidemic of the Black Death was halted. The fire cleaned the city of the impurity that was killing its people.

That’s what God’s fire can do in your life, too. His fire is a purifying, cleansing flame. Sometimes the fire of God comes into our lives and removes those impurities we don’t even know are there. If you’ve ever “been through the fire” you know it is not a pleasant experience. It could be that you are going through a refining experience right now. It’s hot and uncomfortable. It’s scary and you wonder if the fire will ever finish. God is like a refiner’s fire—but remember He loves you and He knows just how much you need to cleanse you of your impurities. There’s a beautiful poem about this I’d like to share:

God sat by a furnace of sevenfold heat,  
As He placed in His precious ore;  
And closer He bent, with a loving gaze,  
As He heated it more and more.  
He knew He had ore that could stand the test;  
And He wanted the finest of gold –  
To mold as a crown for the King to wear;  
Set with gems of a price untold.  
He laid us as gold in the burning fire,  
Though we sure would have told Him “nay;”  
And He watched the dross that we had not seen,  
As it melted and passed away.  
And our gold grew brighter, and yet more bright;  
But our eyes were so dim with tears,  
We saw but the fire – not the Master’s hand –  
And questioned with anxious fears.  
But He waited there with a watchful eye,  
With a love that is strong and sure;  
And His gold did not suffer a bit more heat,  
Than was needed to make it pure.

If God is taking you through the purifying fire right now, don’t resist Him: trust Him. Allow Him to use His fire to get rid of those habits and attitudes that are keeping you from being pure gold for Him.

#### **4. GOD’S FIRE CAPTIVATES THE ATTENTION OF PEOPLE**

Fire is fascinating. People like to watch fires being fought. I like the funny story about the oil well in West Texas that was burning out of control. The Midland and Odessa fire departments were unable to get close enough to put out the fire, and it was burning away. The owner of the well offered \$50,000 to any fire department that could put it out. A few minutes later, a single old fire truck from the Notrees, Texas Volunteer Fire Department came barreling by the other trucks and rolled to a stop right in front of the burning well. The volunteer firefighters were screaming and yelling as they jumped off the truck. They took the hoses and wet each other

down and proceeded to put out the fire. When the fire was out, the well owner approached the fire chief and handed him the check for \$50,000. He said, “Congratulations! What are you going to do with that money?” The chief who looked like he could hardly stand up said, “I’m going to use this money to fix the brakes on that dadgum fire truck!”

There is something about fire we must not forget. When something is on fire, people come to watch it burn. When I was in Louisville, Kentucky in 1981 working on my doctorate, a fire broke out one night in St. Matthew’s Baptist Church. As the fire trucks came to fight the fire, hundreds of people from the neighborhood showed up to watch it. A friend of mine on staff there was watching the scene and said, “More folks showed up to watch our church burn than ever came to worship with us!” He said, “I guess the lesson is: When you have a church that’s really on fire, people will come to watch it burn!”

That’s what happened on the Day of Pentecost. A group of Christians got on fire for Jesus and the crowds came to check it out. Acts 2 says: When the day of Pentecost came ... they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues ... when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment ... amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:3, 6, 12)

God gave each believer a little flame—and when the folks in Jerusalem heard what was happening, they came to check out the fire. 3,000 of them were saved and baptized that very day. 5,000 others were saved a few days later. A good fire attracts a crowd.

Charles Spurgeon used to give this advice to young preachers: Build a fire in the pulpit and people will come to watch it burn. I want our church to be a church on fire for Jesus! I hope Green Acres won’t be known as “that church with the big building.” I pray Green Acres will be known as a church on fire, because if we are church on fire, multitudes of people will come to watch us burn.

Are we a church on fire? Not really. We are an extremely *warm* church, but the warmth of friendship is not the same as the holy fire of God. I fear too many of us are content to set our spiritual thermostats so low we orchestrate the Holy Spirit out of our lives and we are more interested in being “cool Christians” rather than red-hot servants of Jesus.

God doesn’t light churches, He ignites individuals. At Pentecost, each believer had his own little fire, and when they put them together they had a church on fire. Our church will be a church on fire when I get on fire for Jesus and you get on fire for Jesus and we bring our fire together. Like the old hymn says, “Lord as of old at Pentecost, You did your power display in cleansing, purifying flame descend on us today. Lord send the old time power—the Pentecostal power—that sinners be converted and your name glorified!” You can tell when someone is on fire for Jesus. How, because:

## **5. GOD’S FIRE RADIATES THROUGH HIS SERVANTS**

Once God’s fire is lit in your heart, you can’t keep it a secret. When you place an iron bar in a blazing furnace, that bar begins to heat up. You can pull it out after a few minutes and it will be glowing. The same thing will happen to you when you are filled with the Fire of God. You will literally be glowing white-hot with your love for Jesus.

Angels are often described as having shining faces because they are exposed the glory of God. That’s where the idea of halos came from. When Moses saw the afterglow of God’s glory, his face shone like he had been out in the sun for days. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, stood before the Sanhedrin and declared they had murdered the Son of God, they picked up stones and killed him. But before he died they said it looked like his face had been the face of an angel.

When you’ve got this fire, you can’t keep it inside! Jeremiah wrote: “His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:9)

John Wesley was kicked out of the Anglican Church because he was too radical. He preached in fields instead of churches. He was only 4 feet 11 inches tall, but he shook a continent for Christ. Once he was preaching in a crowd and a group of thugs had bragged they were going to interrupt his preaching and beat him up. John preached anyway. In the middle of his message these ruffians approached him with sticks and clubs. But this mighty man of God didn’t stop. Suddenly the leader of the thugs stopped and said, “Look! He glows! He glistens!” They dropped their clubs and sat down and listened and were gloriously saved.

Let me ask you again: **HAS THE FIRE GONE OUT IN YOUR HEART?** Are you known as a glowing witness for Christ? Are you more concerned with being cool than red-hot for Jesus? The fire can go out. That’s why Paul wrote to young Timothy: “I remind you to fan into flame [stir up] the gift of God, which is in you.” (2 Timothy 1:6) In one house we built in Alabama we had a wood-burning stove. In the mornings I would get up and all you could see would be gray ashes, but I could take a poker and stir into those ashes and soon there would be a blaze. That’s what some of you need to do. You need to stir up those ashes of apathy. You’ve become cold and carnal and God wants to re-ignite your fire within! Don’t you want to have His fire? You need it for Power, you need it stay pure; you need His fire to be the kind of Christian that attracts others.

When Solomon dedicated the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem, God came down in fire. We read in II Chronicles 7:1-3: When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the glory of the Lord filled the temple ... when all the people saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped.

In the Old Testament, God had a Temple for His people. Today, God has a People for His Temple. The New Testament tells us our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Wouldn’t you love to have the fire of God fall in your heart and for His glory to fill this temple?

You may be asking, “How can I do that?” First, admit the fire is gone out. Next, refuse to be a cool, apathetic believer. Finally, simply ask God to relight your fire.

There’s a song I’ve been singing for years. Perhaps you recognize it: “Oh, Lord, you’re beautiful. Your face is all I seek. For when your eyes are on this child, your grace abounds to me. O Lord, please light the fire, which once burned bright and clear, replace the lamp of my first love, that burned with holy fear.”

## OUTLINE

### GOD’S FIRE:

#### 1. Illustrates His dazzling presence

“To the Israelites, the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire.” *Exodus 24:17*

“Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering ... And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face-down.” *Leviticus 9:24*

#### 2. Generates unlimited power

“The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire.” *Leviticus 6:12*

### PAUSE FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION: Has the fire gone out in my heart?

#### 3. Eliminates our impure qualities

“For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.” *Malachi 3:2-3*

#### 4. Captivates the attention of the people

When the day of Pentecost came ... they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues ... when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment ... amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “ what does this mean?” *Acts 2:3, 6, 12*

#### 5. Radiates through his servants

“His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.” *Jeremiah 20:9*

“I remind you to fan into flame (stir up) the gift of God, which is in you.” *2 Timothy 1:6*



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes