

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

Compiled by

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SERMON NINE

THE GOD OF THE BURNING BUSH

By

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“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush”
(Exodus 3:2).

You are familiar, I am sure, with the story of the burning bush. You have wondered about it and perhaps questioned its reality. There are some who discredit the story today because of its miraculous element concerning the flame, but overlook an even larger miraculous element, namely, the transformation of defeated, dejected Moses, the fugitive shepherd, into the world's most renowned lawgiver.

What God did with Moses is far more important and miraculous than what God did to the bush. The miracle of an ordinary bush aflame with God in a wilderness cannot compare with the miracle of a forgotten man transformed into a mighty personality for God among men and nations.

We need to go beyond the burning bush to the God whose presence made the bush aflame with His glory. As we let this story speak to our hearts today we find that the God of the Burning Bush is

I. A God of Compassion

There is probably not a more comforting and reassuring message in all the Word of God than the one found in this story. **“And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows”**

Isn't that a glorious word?

- God sees the affliction of His people;
- God hears the cries of His people;
- God knows our sorrows.

Too often we are inclined to feel that God does not see, that He does not hear and that He does not care for us.

It is quite possible that the children of Israel down in Egypt asked God out of their aching hearts and with their bodies aching also from the taskmaster's whip, **"Carest thou not that we suffer?"** And again, **"Is there no hope of deliverance for Israel?"** And, no doubt, through all the days of their supplications, the heavens seemed brass because no relief was apparent. But God cared. His word, **"I have seen the affliction of my people,"** was tantamount to saying "I suffer with my people."

This is an encouraging word concerning prayer. Through the burdensome days and the long nights the Children of Israel cried to God for deliverance from oppression and Egyptian bondage. We can imagine that some said as men often say today—"What is the use? The answer does not come." But the answer did come though it was delayed. While they were praying God was getting ready to answer. The God of the Burning Bush in Midian was the God of the Fireside of the Children of Israel in Egypt.

There were no temples nor synagogues for Israel in Egypt. The altar of the Lord was in the home. It is a family altar. At these altars, Israel poured out her heart unto Almighty God for deliverance and return to Canaan. What a blessing ultimately came to Israel because they gathered in their homes and prayed!

There was nothing more, nor better, for them to do than to pray, and, because they prayed, God saw their tears and heard their cries and delivered them.

And there is nothing more needful for us, or more important in our homes and churches today than a return to the family altar. God is apparently waiting for America to return to the family altar and pray.

Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord in the after years that had been torn down during the propaganda period of the "Association for the Advancement of Atheism" in his day, and upon the rebuilt altar offered an acceptable offering unto the Lord. When the answer to that offering came, it was not only accompanied by a consuming fire from heaven to consume it as an acceptable offering, but also by an abundant rain for the perishing people and parching earth.

Israel prayed by her firesides in Egypt and God answered her prayers. Twenty-five million homes in America with twenty-five million altars unto the Lord with devout devotions daily and petitions for the power and mercy of God would revive the churches, stop wars and depressions, spread the Gospel, and magnify the churches of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth within a decade.

We see also that the God of the Burning Bush with Moses was the God of the Roadside of Israel in Egypt. We can almost hear the swish of the whip in the hands of the taskmasters as they drove the men of Israel to their tasks, and the moans of the men, as they tried to make brick without straw, under the lash of their musters' whip.

Surely, if a man would ever pray, it would be under such circumstances, and we are not surprised when God says, **“I am come down for their deliverance.”**

The oppression of Israel and their heart-cries brought the compassionate God of the Burning Bush to their deliverance just as the oppression of sin in the human heart and in the civic affairs of nations brought Jesus, the anointed one, to deliver men from spiritual bondage.

Here is an example for oppressed labor in the world today, as well as for distressed and confused business men who honestly try to be fair in their dealings with labor. The prayer of the working man in Egypt brought divine interference and deliverance with justice. The earnest prayer of men at work today will contribute more to the equitable solution of all their problems than labor agitators will ever contribute to the permanent peace and prosperity of labor in this nation or generation.

It is quite true that something more than praying ought to be done toward the solution of world and local economic and labor problems. But we can do nothing until we pray. I fear that not much abiding and worthwhile benefit will come until men at work and men of capital shall earnestly pray and seek to work out their difficulties in a Christian and prayerful spirit.

Nothing can mean quite so much toward the solution of capital and labor problems in America as the prayer of business and working men at their places of service. If a man has a position or business into which he cannot take a spirit of prayer, then he ought without hesitation to give up that position or business for his own sake and for the Lord's sake.

We have here a mighty plea for deliverance from oppression and for righteousness demonstrated in the lives of the Children of Israel in Egypt as they prayed at their work for relief. What a mighty power lying dormant today because business men and working men leave God out of their hearts and their business!

There is another vital message in this connection in our story of the burning bush. We see that the God of the Burning Bush in the wilderness was the God of the Bedside of the Children of Israel in Egypt.

Joseph prayed as he died and asked that his body be carried back to Canaan when Israel returned. True religion is not determined by bedside devotion, nor is Christianity a sob story for dying men. Many men think that because they repeat the Lord's Prayer or some Other prayer on going to sleep at night they are Christian and safe. Yet upon awaking the same men will violate every Christian principle of honesty and honor and every command in the Decalogue for the sake of money or pleasure. That kind of bedside religion is worthless.

But with the dying men of Israel and their broken-hearted loved ones, there was a different spirit and the compassion of God is revealed in answer to their prayers and tears.

We find again that the God of the Burning Bush is

II. A God of Action

The Lord said, **“I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey”** (Exodus 3: 8).

Prayer not only changes things but prayer moves God. He said in effect, “Their cry has come up to me and now I am come down to them.” What a pity that we do not learn the secret of prayer today as a means and power to change the status of our homes, or of our church or of our state and nation. “God will avenge his children when they cry unto him day and night,” Jesus said.

It was not enough, however, for God to deliver His children from oppression. He said, **“I am come to bring them up out of Egypt to a good land flowing with milk and honey.”**

God’s concern for His children includes their material as well as their spiritual happiness. God’s movement in the interest of His people is always a movement for the best interests of His people. The measure of God’s action is seen in the difference between the flesh pots of Egypt and oppression, and the freedom of the promised land with an abundance of material blessings as indicated by the expression **“flowing with milk and honey.”**

For a quarter of a century organized Christianity in America and the world have been peculiarly afflicted with materialism.

Churches have thought more largely of themselves; denominational agencies have been burdened with debts or programs of expansion that called for money campaigns for the institutions, and in some cases these campaigns have been conducted apparently from a selfish viewpoint by the leadership of the institution.

Individuals have questioned the policies and programs of missionary enterprises at home and abroad, and withheld funds normally flowing through Christian channels of service. Men began to trust in riches and the security of gilt-edged investments with an increased passion. It was the depression of 1929—perhaps the greatest of modern times, and practically universal—that made men who ought to be loyal to the interests of Christ around the world, as well as men who cared nothing for the interests of Christ, know that **“A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth.”** And again leaders in church and state were reminded that a man’s only real security is in God.

With the depression and the loss of fortunes, business, health, etc., many began to question God’s concern about the material welfare of men. And so materialism began her work in the hearts and consciences of men from another viewpoint. It was to the effect that God is not concerned about material things, but only spiritual things. And that a man is foolish to trust God’s promises in His Word, in this day, where God speaks of material blessings such as Malachi 3:10, **“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in mine house and prove me, now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”**

And the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, “**Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things** (food, clothes and drink, or in other words, the material necessities of life) **shall be added unto you.**”

Also the promise in the third chapter of Proverbs, “**Honor the Lord with thy substance and the firstfruits of all thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy vats burst out with new wine.**”

It was hard for the Children of Israel in Egypt under oppression to understand that God was offering them material blessings—a land flowing with milk and honey—if they would follow Moses.

In the wilderness they murmured against God and Moses and complained of their lot, saying, “**Can God set a table in the wilderness?**” which was tantamount to saying, “We are flesh and blood people in a land where there is nothing to eat. There is nothing for us but starvation, because Moses also is a man and God is invisible. We see the cloud by day and the pillar by night and Moses says God is there leading His people on, but we can’t see how a God in the clouds can give us flesh to eat here on the earth.”

So they were afflicted with materialism and separated religion from business, apparently saying, “It’s all right to be religious about religious things but don’t try to mix religion with business for it will not work.”

We find in this message that God is concerned about our material needs and that He is a God of action and will supply those needs when we meet the conditions which He has imposed upon us.

The land of milk and honey was at the end of the journey for Egypt and it was God’s purpose for His people. But God kept His word and fed them bountifully in the wilderness. Without their experience, the world would not know about manna, and would not understand the deeper significance of the words of Jesus, “**I am the Bread of Life.**”

Christian history is filled with unusual incidents of the action and intervening hand of Almighty God to care for His own.

We find also that the God of the Burning Bush is

III. A God With a Program

The Lord had a program for Israel. One wonders what the history of the world would be today, had Israel only done the will of God from the beginning. But God also had a program for the world. God appeared to Moses in the flaming bush for Israel’s sake, but His appearance was also for the sake of the world. Bound then as now in the same bundle of life with Israel is the world. We are learning today that the God of the Burning Bush is not through with Israel, no more than Christ is through with His Church.

God also had a program for Moses. God needed leadership to accomplish His purpose with men and nations. Moses was a leader. God was seeking leadership and, strange to say, He found that leadership in a wilderness on the outskirts of civilization and far removed from the conflict in which he must first engage.

Why did God turn to Moses? No one knows, and especially in view of the fact that Moses resisted the purpose of God for his life and insisted that there were some things he could not do and apparently to his sorrow in later years was unwilling to attempt to do even for God.

It is not enough to say that God was not satisfied with a university graduate tending sheep when there was a nation in distress that needed his service and leadership. God is not satisfied with any university graduate doing nothing when he can do something for the benefit of humanity and the progress of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world. God is not satisfied with anyone living beneath his privilege and failing to use the talents and opportunities so lavishly bestowed by His beneficent and gracious hands. One does not have to be a university graduate to do worthwhile things in the world. One only needs to yield himself to the Master of men and place his all upon the altar for the Lord to use. With such consecration comes a transformation and peace which brighten life's darkest day and lighten the heart's heaviest load.

God's program for Moses included his fellowship as well as his leadership. God was not satisfied for Moses to walk alone when he could walk with kings and enjoy the fellowship of God. It is a far cry from the mountain of Midian to the marble palace of Pharaoh. By the wildest stretch of the imagination one can hardly conceive of a meek shepherd of the hills warning the wrathful Pharaoh against the hand of Almighty God. But within less than a fortnight Moses was on his way to the Court of Pharaoh with the message of the Lord.

Moses may have been tired of the wilderness, we cannot say, but we know this—that God was not satisfied for Moses to stay in the wilderness when he could abandon the wilderness and build a nation whose name and influence would outlive the greatest empires of history and through which the God of the Burning Bush would come in human flesh for the deliverance of His people Israel and for the redemption of the world.

God has a program for you. He has a program for His church. It is not necessary for Him to appear in a burning bush today to arouse us out of our idleness or to challenge us to service. He is ready to lead us if we will abandon the wilderness, and He is ready to bless us if we will walk with Him and give our best in building His church among the nations of the earth. Let us yield our all today to the God of the Burning Bush.

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.”

Dr. Shelton Gambrell Posey was born at Brookhaven, Miss., Jan. 24, 1893. Education, Miss. College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (A.B. and Th.M.). Ordained, June 6, 1915. Associate, S. S. Sec. for Miss. Baptists, 1920-21. Pastorates: Durant, Miss., 1921-23; Biloxi, Miss., 1923-26; Coliseum Place, New Orleans, La., 1926-35; Austin, Tex., Feb. 1, 1935 to date.

First Baptist Church, Austin, has 2,137 members. Since Feb. 1, 1935, under Dr. Posey's ministry, there have been 650 additions. Total contributions have been \$100,000. Their record S. S. attendance is 1,003. Total value of all church property is \$300,000 (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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