

“GOD’S FIRE AMONG US”
2 Chronicles 7:1-3, Nehemiah 9:16-21, Matthew 3:4-12
Revival Fire #4, June 25-26, 2022

Over the last few weeks, we’ve been looking at God’s Holy Fire of revival for all those who wish to come to Him and follow His will and His ways. The disciples of Jesus experienced God’s Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and He transformed their lives, giving them the courage and power to share the Gospel message to all the people of Jerusalem. But this was not the first time God’s Holy Fire worked to revive the spiritual lives of the people.

Elijah called the people of Israel back to God as he challenged King Ahab in a contest to see who was the real God of Israel; Baal and Asherah or the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who answered by fire was the real God, the one who Was and Is and Is to Come. The people of Israel saw the Lord God’s response of burning up the sacrifice, altar stones, ground and water in the trench, and they immediately left their worship of Baal and returned to worshipping the Lord God of Israel.

But even before that, God’s Holy Fire of revival converted Moses and all of the Hebrew people from the mindset of slavery to Egypt, to be the people of God in the Promised Land. God’s Fire showed up in the desert, on the mountain, and in the wilderness in order to lead the people and keep their worship of God true and primary. Even though they struggled in their obedience to God, the people gradually learned the value of worshipping and following the Lord, and Him alone.

Now, that’s all fine and good, but how does it affect our lives? **How can we be influenced today by God’s Holy Spirit Fire so that our lives are transformed and renewed?** How are we to find the Holy Spirit encouraging us and challenging us to worship the Lord God Almighty with all our heart, mind, soul and strength? Well, today, I’d like to lead you in exploring how we can find God’s fire among us, so that we might be able to live according to His will and His ways in the world we live in. Let’s learn from a few more examples of Scripture about God’s Holy Spirit Fire.

In our first Scripture lesson of 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, it tells of the response of God as the people dedicated the new Temple to Him. Solomon had fulfilled David’s dream of building a Temple for the

Lord, using all of the materials that David had amassed for its construction. **When the Temple was finished, after the Ark of the Covenant was placed into the Holy of Holies, Solomon gathered all the people together and celebrated the majesty of God.** Then they worshipped God, and Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication of the Temple to the Lord, asking that the Lord would be merciful on His people when they humbled themselves, and came before Him, and acknowledged Him as the only true God. *“Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. Now he had made a bronze platform...and had placed it in the center of the outer court. He stood on the platform and then knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven”* as he prayed (2 Chronicles 6:12-13)

As he finished praying, Solomon made this request of the Lord, *“Now arise, O Lord God, and come to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your might. May Your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, may Your saints rejoice in Your goodness. O Lord God, do not reject Your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David Your servant”* (2 Chron. 6:41-42).

Worship and prayer are the right things to do to honor God. And, as we heard, “when Solomon dedicated the temple, God again manifested Himself by sending fire from heaven to light the altar. All the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the Shekinah glory hovering above the Temple, and they fell on their faces before God in Worship.”¹ God was pleased to be in the company of the people, delighting in their worship, and He gladly showed off His glory to all those present so that they could believe in Him and dedicate their lives in service to Him.

God also delights to come here into this place as we worship Him and pray to Him and dedicate our lives into His service. What a marvelous God we have, and He is pleased to receive us as His people as we dedicate ourselves to Him in worship. Yet we are not allowed to do whatever we want, call ourselves Christians and then expect the Lord God to come be here with us. We are to be His people as we live out His commands, as we diligently seek to honor Him with our lives, and as we

¹ (Wesley Duewel, *Revival Fire*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995], pg.22-23)

persistently strive to live differently than the world to demonstrate that we are His people.

Being a Christian in name only (CINO) does not make us a follower of Jesus. I can tell you straight out, that if you call yourself a follower of Jesus, yet live according to the ways of the world, there is no way that the Lord God will come make Himself present with you. We must live according to His will and His ways if we are to see His glorious Holy Spirit Fire among us. Not only must our life demonstrate God's ways, but our spirits must be in tune with Him through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. God will come only to those who humble themselves before Him, willing to surrender their lives to His command. And that's the difficult part.

You see, in our world today of "equality" and "equal rights," we expect God to follow our guidelines and come bless us with His presence, even if we don't agree with Him, even if we rebel against His ways. We think today that God should be with us because we show up at church a time or two. We think we should have access to all the benefits of God's power and presence just because we know something about His Son, Jesus. But folks, that's not gonna happen! **God doesn't pander to our will and our way. He expects us to follow His will and His way, and then, maybe then, He will make Himself present with us.** When we turn our hearts and minds and lives over to following His commands, using His standards and guidelines to order our lives, when we claim Jesus Christ as our Savior and seek to follow Him and live for Him each day, THEN the Lord says He will give us His Holy Spirit and we will experience His presence with us.

We see that in the lesson of Nehemiah 9:16-21. When the people followed God, He freely went with them to guide them and direct them. But when they "*became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey [the Lord's] commands*" (Nehemiah 9:16-17), when they rebelled against God and refused to follow His will and ways, the people found themselves exiled, enslaved to other country's governments, and outside of the land of Israel, because God had removed Himself from their presence. God allowed consequences to happen to the people in order to remind them that it is only by His will and His way that we are to live. And when we live for Him, then He delights to make us His people.

If we turn away from the Lord our God, we can expect the same thing. If we as Christians fail to influence our society and call the people to stay true to God's commands, we also find ourselves with all kinds of hardships, all kinds of persecution and oppression from leaders who only desire their will and their way. If we neglect to follow God's commands, then we also can expect to be overrun by other countries, conquered by the enemy and maybe even taken into captivity. How could God bless us when we do not follow Him? **Why would God continue to bless us if we blatantly turn against Him?**

Nehemiah had been allowed by King Artaxerxes to return to Israel from Babylon to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah had found favor with God because he had stayed true to Him in all his ways. Like several others who were exiled into Babylon, he did not follow the religious practices of worshipping the king and other false gods. Nehemiah stayed true to the Lord God Almighty and diligently sought to follow Him. And in doing so, God gave him favor with the king so that he could return to Jerusalem to do this great thing for the people of Israel.

But the people of Israel in Jerusalem had to first confess their sins and seek the Lord God again. They had to acknowledge that their wandering away from God was what got them into the mess of being exiles and occupied people in the first place. They all had to turn from their wicked ways and return to following the laws and statutes of the Lord before God would allow them to be restored.

Our lesson for today is a part of Nehemiah's call for the people to return to the Lord. He reminds them of how they had turned away from the Lord. And He calls them to remember God's loving kindness to those of Israel who repented and turned back to the Lord along their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. God did not hold onto His anger against His people forever, but continued to guide them with His pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night so that they could grow closer to Him. God continued to supply them with manna and quail for food, and provided them water when they became thirsty. **God delighted in showing the people His blessing and His presence because they returned to Him.**

Since God is "*a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in*

love” (Neh. 9:17), He will do the same for us when we repent of our sinful ways, when we turn from the wicked and evil practices of our world, and when we seek Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And He will grant us His Holy Spirit to guide us, and transform us, and empower us to do great things.

And many years later, after a silence from God for over 400 years, John the Baptist came along as the harbinger of Lord’s Messiah, to call the people once more out of their sinful, worldly ways, and to turn to the One who would bring eternal salvation to all who would believe in Him. Hear the promise as it is written in Matthew 3:4-12. (READ Matthew 3:4-12)

While the leaders and the people came to John, they were not yet ready for the Messiah. So John gave them the challenge, “*Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...*” (Matt. 3:8). **Baptism was not to just be an outward sign for all the others to see how good we say we are, but the sign of an inward and spiritual change that had first taken place within their hearts.** Then they were to live and work in such a way that demonstrated the change that had taken place within them. The water of baptism made no difference in the life of the person if there was no change within their heart, first.

The requirement for gaining God’s Holy Spirit Fire, then, is for us to repent, confess our sins, and become baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One who will then give us the Holy Spirit through fire, to empower us to live boldly as His witnesses in our world today. In the next few weeks we’ll be seeing all that the Holy Spirit has to offer us when we humble ourselves to follow Jesus Christ. But let me give you an example of what can happen when we begin to worship and pray and confess our sins before the Lord our God.

In his May 9, 2000 article in *Christianity Today*, entitled “Revival at Public School Stirs 100 Students to Conversion,” Todd Stames writes:

“What started as a special presentation by the Pearl River Central High School’s Fellowship of Christian Athletes turned into a full-fledged revival that has transformed the Carriere, Mississippi, school and left school administrators astounded.

"It was the most incredible thing I've seen in all my years as an educator,' said Pearl River principal Lolita Lee. 'The meeting couldn't be stopped. You could tell something spiritual was happening in the lives of those students.'

"The revival started during a special program sponsored by the school's FCA and attended by nearly 90 percent of the school's 670 students. The program was originally scheduled for one hour, but when the bell rang, Principle Lee said there were more than 100 students standing in line to pray and make spiritual decisions.

"So Principle Lee did something that she said probably doesn't happen in normal public school settings—she let the service continue. And continue it did, for more than four hours. Through three class periods and lunch, students wept, prayed, sang, and made amends with one another.

"It was heart-stopping,' said Lee, a member of the local Baptist church. 'When I realized how many students needed to pray, I went ahead and let the program continue.'

"Following a hastily arranged telephone call to the school superintendent, Lee went back to the gymnasium where the revival was taking place. 'Who was I to say to these students, "Hey, you aren't important. Go back to class"?'"

"And nearly one month later, Lee said the results of the revival were manifested in the hallways of Pearl River Central High. 'I've had teachers and staff tell me how much better the students are,' she said. "This has been a wonderful thing for our kids.'"²

This world desperately needs people who are willing to follow God's laws and commands unashamedly, boldly proclaiming the possibility for new life to those who are around them. The students of that Fellowship of Christian Athletes group were given the power to stand up before their fellow students and tell them about Jesus so that they could receive Him as they confessed their sins and let Him become their Savior. And what a difference it made in that one high school! And not only that school, I'm sure that it transformed many homes as those students went back home and lived differently

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustration*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 200] pg. 233-234)

before their parents. And how much change would have happened in the community when those families found their lives changed and then touched the lives of others in Pearl River?

You see, the work of the Holy Spirit's Fire brings about tremendous results as we humble ourselves before the Lord and find ourselves in His presence.

- Instead of having Drag Queen Story Hours in schools, what might happen in our world today if we were to give the students the chance to explain Jesus to their classmates and invite them to receive Jesus as their Savior?
- What might our United States look like if we were to allow prayer back in schools, and have the 10 Commandments listed on the walls outside of the school office, and have the opportunity for Christian teachers to help guide their students to live according to the guidelines of the Bible?
- What might happen if instead of dividing each other by teaching Critical Race Theory, we were to teach our students how to respect each other, no matter what hair color they might have, or skin color they might have, or country they were from?
- What might happen if instead of teaching comprehensive sex education, we were to teach boys and girls to wait until they were married to have sex with each other?
- What might our universities look like if instead of teaching Marxist protocol and Socialistic ideology, professors were to teach their students about the benefits of living out the Laws and Commandments of the Lord our God?
- What would our communities look like if instead of glorifying drugs and alcohol use, we were to help everyone live to respect and love their neighbors as they love themselves?
- What might our country look like if instead of our churches conforming to the ways of the world, they boldly teach the difference that Jesus makes when we accept Him as Lord and Savior of our lives and follow His teachings every day?
- How great would it be if, when God saw our striving as a nation to seek after Him, that He would pour out His Holy Spirit's Fire among us and allow us to see His presence with us?

Oh, people, the ways of God are meant to guide us to find His blessings throughout our lives. But without those who are diligently living according to God's commands make a stand for Jesus in their whole life and help others to come to Him, all we have left is to submit to and conform with the ways of a Godless world. **When we give up seeking after the Lord God Almighty, all we have left is the worship of ourselves and our man-made deities.**

When we return to the Lord our God, humble ourselves and pray to Him, seeking Him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, God is ready and waiting to pour out His Holy Spirit's Fire upon us so that we can live for Him and lead the whole world back to Him. Will it be easy? No. Will it be an uphill battle? Yes. Will it take all of us to make the difference in our world for the sake of Jesus Christ? Yes. The question is whether or not we are willing to begin the process of returning to the love of the Lord Jesus, follow His ways and boldly live and speak so that others might see us and desire what we have - Jesus Christ as Lord our their heart.

When we do that, God's Holy Spirit Fire will be among us to guide us and direct our lives each day. **Open your hearts today to let Jesus be the Lord of your life. Ask Him to give you the Holy Spirit, and watch what God's fire among us will do.** Let's pray...

Father, we need Your Son, Jesus, so badly in our lives. Our world is a mess because we have turned our backs against You and gone our own separate ways. But God, You have not forsaken us yet. You have continued to bless us abundantly, despite our rebellion against You. Help us to give up our foolish, worldly ways. Give us the courage to turn away from the evil and wicked ways of this world and let Your Holy Spirit empower us to transform the lives of those around us. We confess to You today that we are sinners in need of Your grace through Jesus Christ our Savior. Forgive us and make us clean before You once more. Then let us see again Your Fire from Heaven to eternally convince us that we are not god, but You are. Take our life, Lord, and let it be consecrated to You so that we may, indeed be Your holy people, ready to serve You in every way. This we pray in Jesus' Powerful and Holy Name. AMEN.