

Title: “That Which Burns”

Chris Ryan

Exodus 3:2

11/30/2022

Service Readings: Exodus 3:1–14, Isaiah 25:6–9, John 15:1–8

This is not the first account of God come down to his people. That designation is recorded in the first pages of Genesis when God walked with Adam and Eve. This was not the second time, either for God spoke to Cain. Then there was Noah, and Job, and Abraham, and Jacob. And, it wouldn't be the last time, either. For after Moses there would be Judges, Kings, and then the greatest visit of them all – Jesus. And after he returns back to his father, we are introduced into this story as he comes down to us in our baptism and the Lord's Supper. And then, finally, at some point, he will return again in full honor and glory and will walk with us forever.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In isolation, without any additional context, this is a fascinating story. And the intensity only increases as we consider that it is a true historic event; it simply *did* happen. This we believe. There was a man named Moses; there was a bush engulfed in fire; the bush was not consumed. There was a voice from heaven, God, who spoke to Moses. And God prophesized, instructed, and sent Moses on his mission. And when we add to this a broader historical context it becomes even more fascinating. God saw his people were enslaved with no hope of escape and so he sent someone that would free them from slavery and lead them to the promised land. And that, also, *did* happen. There is no wonder, then, that so many movies about this have been brought to screen. The subject simply *screams* action and adventure!

But if our consideration of Moses, Israel, the burning bush, and the exodus ends at this point, if we view it only as an event in history that starts and ends with his life, we lose out on the richness of Scripture – not just this passage but *all* of Scripture. And it is because this is really not about him, or about the nation or even about the miracles. It's actually about Jesus. And when we recognize the story of Moses as an event pointing to the exodus from the slavery of sin that Jesus offers us, the parallels become obvious: we can see that God uses Moses to point to Jesus.

But even *this* is not a suitable place to terminate these connected points. For if we draw a line only from Moses to Jesus, even if that line runs through the cross to the empty grave, we are *still* missing out on the richness of Scripture! For you see, only seeing Jesus and Moses means that we see these events disconnected from our own lives – both earthly and eternal. And when we view ourselves as little more than audience members, reclining in the seat of the present time as the movie of the past shines on the screen in front of us, we detach ourselves from the *effects* that these events have on us. And if we become detached, we lose out on a deeper understanding of God's Word. And so, tonight my aim is to not only remove you from the theater seat, not only place you inside the movie, alongside Moses and the bush, but even impress upon you that although this portion of

scripture is riddled with Moses, and even though behind the scenes the plot is all about something that will happen several thousand years later, the motivation of the plot, the *reason* for it all playing out, is you. It really is all about you.

So, let us take a step back and start with the burning bush. Or, more specifically with God's voice through the burning bush. Our passage begins this way:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

This is not the first account of God come down to his people. That designation is recorded in the first pages of Genesis when God walked with Adam and Eve. This was not the second time, either for God spoke to Cain. Then there was Noah, and Job, and Abraham, and Jacob. And, it wouldn't be the last time, either. For after Moses there would be Judges, Kings, and then the greatest visit of them all – himself in the flesh.

Over and again, God descends to be with his people, to speak to them, to live among them, and to serve them. This is truly a personal God; one who is intimately interested in each individual that he created. Consider that the same God who spoke to Moses in the bush is the same exact God who speaks to us through Scripture. The very same God who was deeply interested in the lives of Israel, the lives of Moses, is deeply interested in your life and mine. You see, *this* is a connection between us and the story of God – it is a connection that draws us into his movie, onto his movie screen, and begins to connect us to Moses and the other prophets and actors.

And through this event, I think he uses the element of fire to make that connection. Consider for example, the burning bush itself. From where did God's voice come from? The bush, of course. Verse 4 says: ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." God was present in the engulfed bush. He didn't call down from heaven like he had in other times. *This* time he called from within the fire, from within the bush. He was in, with, and under that bush – it was engulfed by his presence, and yet it was not destroyed! What a powerful illustration of God's fire that doesn't destroy but consumes! And it consumes, not for destruction, but for creation, for purification. God warns Moses: "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Is it no wonder then that the Holy Spirit is depicted throughout Scripture as a consuming fire? Is it as if God is showing us that through baptism, we are this burning bush that he comes down and enters into, purifying and preparing for work in this world.

You see? We are much more than disconnected audience members in the movie of God. By being a part of this living story, then, we are connected to not just the events of the past, but the promise

of the future. And Jesus is the means for this connectedness. It is through his blood that we find connection with Moses, with Israel, and with the freedom from slavery that they experienced, because we were also enslaved, not to Egypt but to Satan. And just as God sent Moses to free his people from the grips of earthly reign, he sent Jesus to free us, his people, from the grips of demonic reign. This is full plot of the movie, and it doesn't make sense if we are not participants in it.

During this advent season we are exploring Old Testament passages that foretell the coming of Jesus. The importance of this cannot be understated but don't lose sight of the why. Don't become distracted with the what and the how. The why is what is most important. The why is what places you on the screen. The why is what gives meaning for everything in Scripture. The why is what motivated God to act in every way that he did. And the why is, of course, you. All of this, every action by God is an action on your behalf so that you can forever give glory to him. So stay out of the theater seat and participate in your story of eternal life.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Upon the mountain, the bush burned bright with your glory. From within you called your servant Moses to lead your people from slavery. You later sent your son to earth to lead us out of our own slavery. In our baptism we you connect us to yourself and purify us with the blood of Christ. You send the Holy Spirit to burn in us like the flame from the mountaintop – purifying us and preparing us for life with you. We ask that you continue to work in us that we may point others to you so that they can also experience everlasting life.

Amen.