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Fire From Heaven

by Del Fehsenfeld Jr.

It had been an exhausting day. The hot sun beat down on the parched earth. The crowd had sat under the cloudless sky for what seemed like an eternity - silent spectators in this play-off between Baal and Jehovah. Jehovah's side was hopelessly outnumbered - the odds, 850 to 1 in favor of Baal.

Silently they watched and waited and wondered, as the prophets of Baal tried first one tactic and then another to persuade the god of lightning and fire to prove himself and send fire from heaven. They pled, they appealed. Unsuccessful, they began to cry out more earnestly, to cajole, to demand that Baal heed them and send fire. Still no answer. Still no fire.

Undaunted, they persisted in leaping upon the altar, and in cutting themselves until the blood flowed - desperate, vain attempts to prove their sincerity to Baal and to see some evidence - any evidence - of spiritual reality. But there was no sign of fire from heaven - not even a spark. In fact, there had been no movement of any kind in the heavens for more than three years - no fire, no rain, no voice, no reality.

Weary with the exercise in futility, desire turned to disappointment and defeat.

At this point in the familiar account, one cannot help but notice some striking similarities to the church in our day.

By and large, we are not lacking in activity, fervor, or attempts to obtain spiritual power. To the contrary, our church calendars are bulging with services, retreats, conferences, and programs. We are making lots of noise. We are busy, earnest, and perhaps, sincere. But still, there is a deafening silence in the heavens. There is no fire. It's not that we're not trying. We are. But, apparently, all of our programs, promotions, meetings, buses, budgets, baptisms, committees, and conventions have failed to produce the one thing which we most desperately need - fire from heaven.

And while the spiritual leaders and activists are busily trying to produce sparks, the average church member sits back with the rest of the world - waiting, watching, and wondering. Oh yes, theologically they know that Jehovah is the only true God of fire. But can they be blamed for asking deep within themselves questions they would never dare to verbalize? Is God really as powerful as their pastor claims He is? After all, they've never seen anything truly supernatural or unexplainable. Most of the "spiritual" results they've seen can be accounted for in purely human terms.

Into the arena now steps a solitary figure. For years he has been a fugitive from the king whose wrath he incurred three years earlier. One would expect him to cower in the presence of the offended monarch. After all, he stands to lose his life. But, no, he is secure, assured, and bold.

Now he is calling to the people to listen. They gather around him somewhat skeptically. This man has always been something of an oddity - a real contrast to the other religious leaders of his day. His has always been a minority voice. His message cuts across the grain of what is traditional and palatable. His challenge to "get off the fence" and take a public stand for Baal or Jehovah, makes the average person uncomfortable. They'd rather not commit themselves.

Now he directs their attention to the altar of Jehovah. Unused for many years, it is in a state of disrepair. One by one, he selects 12 large stones and constructs an altar. He prepares the sacrifice and places it on the altar. Nothing out of the ordinary yet.

But then he catches them off guard. Turning to the crowd, he directs them to fill four barrels full of water and pour them on the sacrifice.

What?! Has he lost his mind? Anyone knows wet wood won't burn! And, even more importantly, doesn't this strange man know that it hasn't rained for over three years? They are down to the last few days of their meager water supply.

"Fill four barrels full ..."

"He sounds crazy to me - but, on the other hand, this may be the only hope we've got. After all, Baal hasn't done anything to help us ..."

"Whoosh."

"What a waste! We're all going to die!"

"Do it again ..."

"There goes the last drop of water we've got. It's never cost me so much to serve God!"

Then a short, simple prayer, and ... FIRE! No matches. No kerosene. No magic tracks. No gyrations. No pretending. Just fire. Real fire. Fire that licks up the water and utterly consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the stones - even the dust on the ground. Fire from heaven. The fire of God.

What Is the Fire of God?

I do not know of any greater need in the church today than for the fire of God to fall. Just what do we mean by the fire of God?

I'm talking about the manifest presence and glory of God. I'm talking about the supernatural power of God. I'm talking about services that are more than just nice meetings with nice music and nice preaching. I'm talking about results that cannot be explained in terms of human effort. I'm talking about that which man cannot program, manipulate, plan, or make happen. I'm talking about something more than the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His people. I'm talking about the extraordinary outpouring of His Spirit. I'm talking about the fire of God.

What Does the Fire Do?

When the fire falls, we see God for who He really is. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal God to be a God of fire. In the 20th century, we have come to teach and worship two Gods - "the God of the Old Testament," who is loving, merciful, and gracious. But the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. At Mt. Sinai, where the law was given, God revealed Himself with "lightnings and thunders and voices." Then, in the last book of the Bible, the Apostle John was given a glimpse into the Throne Room of Heaven. Out of the throne "proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices."

What we have today is a concept of God as a gray-haired, cosmic grandfather, sitting in a rocking chair, pushing buttons, passively tolerating and winking at the sin in the world and the church.

But God has not changed since Mt. Sinai. The only difference in John's vision is that there is a Lamb next to the throne. He has given His life to satisfy the wrath of a holy God against our sin. But God is no less holy or just. He is no less a God of wrath and judgment against those who spurn the provision of the cross by sinning willfully.

When the fire falls, God comes. And when God shows up, people are more comfortable on their face on the floor, than sitting in a pew. The Beloved Apostle John fell back, terrorized at the vision of God. Even the seraphims in Isaiah's vision had to cover their faces from the overwhelming view of God's holiness and glory.

Dear Friend, how long has it been since you've seen God? How long since you have been overcome by the awareness of His holiness and a sense of your unworthiness before Him?

When the fire falls, it consumes everything that is unholy, earthly, or temporal. The fire of God purifies, purges, melts, and devours, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). God is like a refiner's fire (Malachi 3:2) that brings impurities to the surface, and exposes and consumes them.

When the fire falls, sin is judged and dealt with thoroughly and uncompromisingly - not just the obvious sins of the flesh, but subtle, secret sins of the spirit, as well. Masks of respectability are pulled off, pretense stripped away, and the souls of men laid bare before the gaze of an all-seeing, all-knowing God.

When the fire comes, there is deep, heart conviction and grief over sin. The intense searchlight of God's holiness makes things once thought acceptable, to suddenly become abhorrent. Indifference is turned to mourning. A casual attitude toward sin is replaced by brokenness and genuine repentance.

When the fire falls, the efforts and works of believers are tested. Much of what appeared to be spiritual activity, is exposed to be nothing more than fleshly effort and is consumed as wood, hay, and stubble.

When the fire falls, our traditional methods and programs are all yielded to His Lordship and the Holy Spirit begins to pre-empt in reality over the workings and operation of His Church. When the fire falls, there is power, there is life, there is purity, there is spontaneity, there is reality.

Where is the fire of God today? Where is the evidence of His presence and power? Where is the sense of awe, of wonder, of fear in His presence? Where are the tears of brokenness and contrition? Where are lost people falling on their faces, overcome by the reality of God's presence in the midst of His people? What church in your community is known to have the fire of God? In what Sunday School class, what home, what mom, dad, or teen-ager is the fire present?

Why Don't We Have the Fire?

1. In many cases, we don't have the fire of God because we don't think we need it. We are content to live without it. The Israelites didn't think they needed fire. They thought they needed water. They focused on their felt need, while being blind to their real need. But once the fire came, then the rain came.

For the most part, our nation, churches, homes, and lives today are devoid of the glory and power of God. But when asked to state our needs, we speak of needing bigger buildings, more money, more volunteers, better staff, more equipment, etc. Why can't we see that our real need is for God Himself?

We have sinned against God and He has withdrawn His manifest presence from us. But our eyes have grown accustomed to the darkness. We have gotten used to functioning in our own effort. Hardly anyone questions the authenticity of our results. Someone has said that if the Holy Spirit were taken out of the average church, 95 percent of the program would just keep right on going.

We have become blinded to our true spiritual condition and need. Like the Laodicean church, we think we are "rich, increased with goods, and have need of nothing."

I hear Christian leaders today speak of how Christianity is flourishing. Others insist we are in the throes of revival. If that is the case, then why is every form of moral impurity rampant in our evangelical, Bible-preaching churches? Why is the divorce rate as high in the church as it is in the world? Why do the vast majority of Christians never introduce anyone to Christ? Why do people laugh their way down the aisle to make "decisions"?

Why are our churches loaded with people who want a part-time, convenient, weekend Christian experience and who show no serious interest in spiritual growth? Why do pastors have to twist people's arms to give, to serve, to get involved in the work of the ministry? Why are church splits so common? Why are so many professing Christians barren, empty, hurting, confused, and in spiritual bondage? Why is the world so utterly disinterested in what we have to offer?

As long as we think we're doing all right, we will never be motivated to cry out to God to send fire from heaven.

2. I believe another reason we don't have the fire is that we really don't want it. Oh, we say that we do. But what too many of us really want is the kind of "fire" that will draw attention to our church, pack our auditoriums, increase our offerings, and solve all our problems. We don't want the fire that will consume, destroy, expose, root up, burn, and hurt. We're afraid of what might happen if God appeared on the scene. We want a tidy religious experience that we can control.

Furthermore, we don't want the kind of preaching that precedes revival. I have found that many people want nothing but encouragement and "love" from the pulpit. They don't want the truth! Preaching on sin, repentance, holiness, brokenness, or confession is considered negative. "You're putting people on a guilt trip. You'll damage their self-esteem." I wish we were half as concerned about people having a proper view of God as we are about people having a proper view of themselves! Deceived by the world, our ego-centric theology has become more concerned about self-image than about God's image.

3. We don't have the fire of God because we don't believe it can happen today. In order to justify our impotence, we have dispensationalized away most of God's Word. "That's Old Testament!" "God doesn't work that way today." A serious study of the history of revival reveals that every revival is, in a sense, a repetition of what took place on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit is poured out upon His people in an extra-ordinary way, and the manifest presence and power of God are released.

But in our concern to avoid the excesses and abuses of certain movements, we have denied altogether the possibility of a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We don't pray for miracles, because we don't really believe that God still does miracles in the 20th century!

4. Finally, we don't have the fire of God, because we aren't willing to pay the price to get it.

We want an instantaneous, costless, painless revival. We want all the positive results and benefits of revival - all at little or no cost. We want gain without pain. We want the joy of new life without going through the travail of labor pains. We want healing, without surgery. We want joy without mourning. We want to enter into the power of the Resurrection, without first suffering the agony of the Cross. We want our schedules and programs and institutions to stay intact - we want a minimum of disruption or interference with our plans and traditions.

Revival involves a process - a process that requires plowing up the hardened, uncultivated ground of our hearts, before there can be planting of the seed, and ultimately, a harvest. The plowing is painful. But it cannot be circumvented. And it takes time. Yes, time is an unavoidable part of the price. Weekend, mini "revivals" may be easier to fit into our schedules, but they are unlikely to result in genuine revival.

Elijah had been in a process of preparation and purification for 3-1/2 years, before God sent the fire. And the people of Israel had suffered the consequences of their sin for the same period of time before they got desperate enough for God to send the fire.

We're too busy to listen to God. God meets with those who wait for Him (Isaiah 64:4), but we want Him to send the fire on our timetable. And He'd better be through by noon! Friend, God simply will not fit into our plans, our schedules, or our timetables. He is God! And He must be given the freedom to operate as He wills, on His schedule.

If God is going to send the fire, we've got to be willing, if necessary, to discard our man-made traditions, methods, structures, and programs, to make room for Him. It's not that those things are wrong, in and of themselves. But for too many of us, they have become gods. Anything that has become more essential to us than His presence, is part of the price He will require.

There certainly will be no fire until the sacrifice has been offered. For the Israelites, it meant placing their water supply on the altar. God didn't need water. But when He had their water supply, then He had them. And that's what He wanted all along.

I don't know what sacrifice God may require of you or your church. He may ask you to surrender your reputation and what others think of you. He may ask you to bear criticism, misunderstanding, and rejection from those whose opinions matter most to you. He may ask you to quit your job. He may ask you to put your life savings or retirement fund on the altar. Ultimately, it is ourselves that God wants to be laid on the altar.

Let me ask you a question. Do you want the fire? How badly do you want it? What price are you willing to pay to get it?

Are you willing to sacrifice that which is most precious to you? Are you discontent to go on living without it? If so, join me in crying out to the God of Elijah, the God of Fire:

Revive us again;
Fill each heart with Thy love.
May each soul be rekindled
With fire from above.

Hallelujah, Thine the glory;
Hallelujah, Amen.
Hallelujah, Thine the glory;

Revive us again!

Re: Fire From Heaven - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2006/8/14 1:26

This is very good and blunt. Cuts to the quick. The fire is departed. As Ravenhill said, we are trying to work something UP in church, when all along God needs to send something DOWN. Oh, when will our pastors and deacons see this! I'm so tired of fireless services. Send thy holy, purging flame and torch my heart O God! Burn away all the dross till I'm pure and clean and refined for your sole purpose and pleasure...and then use my vessel to glorify your name in all holiness, love and purity.

Bro. Paul