

The Burning Bush – Exodus 3:1-10

I. Introduction:

- A. I assume you all know how the Lord revealed Himself to Moses through the burning bush.
1. My wife, like so many other Sunday School teachers, has flannel graph illustrations, which I have no doubt she has shared with many of our children.
 2. And there are references to this event scattered across the Word of God.
 3. In **Deuteronomy 33** **Moses** makes a passing reference to the blessings of the One who dwelt in the bush.
 4. The **Lord Jesus** in teaching the unbelieving Sadducees about resurrection spoke about the burning bush.
 - a. **Luke 20:37** – *“Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the BUSH, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*
 - b. *For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.”*
 - c. How is the bush a part of a lesson on resurrection? Admittedly, in a round about way.
 - d. But He who could keep a dry old bramble bush from turning into ash while burning, can certainly raise the dead body of a man from the grave – or from dust and ashes.
 5. That burning bush was important enough to come up again in **Stephen’s** short history of Israel –
 - a. **Acts 7:30** – *“And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a FLAME of FIRE in a BUSH.*
 - b. *When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,*
 - c. *Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.”*
 6. In each of these references the lessons deal with God’s revelation of Himself to Moses.
- B. I don’t remember how it came about, but some time ago it occurred to me to look at this burning bush differently than I ever had before.
1. Of course the details of the event took place exactly as we are told.
 - a. There really was a bush, which I’ll try to describe in just a minute.
 - b. There really was a conversation between God and Moses through that bush.
 2. And yes, Moses was called into God’s ministry through the miracle of the burning bush.
 3. But what about the bush itself?
 4. What are the lessons which we might draw from the bush?
- C. I didn’t run to my library, pulling out obscure commentaries and searching for other men’s sermons.
1. I confined myself to my King James Bible, and to the two Bible programs on my computer.
 2. I first looked up the Hebrew words, and glanced at the three commentaries in my *“E-sword”* program.
 3. And I also engaged my imagination.
 4. One of the commentaries suggested that the burning bush **could** be used to **represent three things**.
 - a. Either it was **Israel in Egypt** – reduced to poverty, but still with a small flame of life.
 - b. Or it could be used to illustrate **Israel today** – just as it was in Egypt but on a larger scale.
 - c. Or, as that Protestant commentary put it, it could be used to illustrate *“the church.”*
 5. But, as I said, I had already engaged my imagination, and I saw a different application.
 6. The burning bush is an illustration of **you** and of **me**.
- D. After just a few minutes I had jotted down in my sermon idea book a page full of notes.
1. They don’t gel into a three point sermon, but I hope they can be used by the Holy Spirit to remind us of our responsibilities as Christians.
 2. What is the chief purpose of man and especially of the Christian?
 3. The primary purpose for our creation and our new birth is to serve and glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

II. Observations on the event of the burning bush.

- A. When Moses was forty years old, God sent him to the backside of the desert, giving him time to grow up.
1. And that involved the emptying of his heart and all his external strengths.
 2. The only way that man could be of service to God was if he gave up his personal pride.
 3. Forty years later Moses was ready to cast himself aside and to listen to the Lord.
- B. So the pre-incarnate Son of God revealed Himself to the man who would lead Israel out of Egypt.
1. I know the Bible says that *“the angel of the Lord”* appeared to Moses.
 2. But it was *“THE angel of the Lord,”* and in **verse 6** He said, *“I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*
 3. This was not a created angel – one of those special servants and messengers of God.
 4. This was Second Person of the God-head, whose primary roll has always been to reveal God to men.
 5. So God was prepared to speak to the man, and this man was finally prepared to listen to God.
- C. What was it that caught Moses’ attention? It was not simply that a bush was on fire.
1. I have heard some people suggest that this kind of fire was not an uncommon event. I’m not so sure.
 2. Nevertheless, what drew Moses’ attention was that the bush was not consumed or burned up by the fire.
 3. My investigation of the Hebrew word, led me to the fact that this was a thorn bush of some sort.
 4. I picture it as a dry and brittle brambly bush – the kind Br’er Rabbit would hide in.
 5. It is reasonable to think that it would go up in smoke in a matter of minutes, if not seconds depending on its size.
 6. But the ***bush didn’t evaporate*** in a ***cloud of smoke***, and that stirred Moses’ curiosity.
 7. And ***I am curious*** as to whether or not there was any smoke at all.
 8. When He who is an all-consuming fire burns something there may be no residue whatsoever – no ash, no cinders, not even any smoke.
- D. When Moses started to creep closer for a better look, the Lord called to him.
1. *“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.”*
 2. Don’t we see here the omniscience and sovereignty of God in this?
 3. The Lord had chosen this man for salvation and to special service, and He specifically called his name.
 4. Moses was irresistibly drawn to the fire, like a moth to the flame, and he irresistibly responded, *“Here am I.”*
- E. We are told that this place where the bush burned was ***“holy ground.”***
1. *“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”*
 2. Undoubtedly Moses removed the sandals he was wearing, making me wonder if his feet started to burn.
 - a. And was there heat from the fire, making his face burn?
 - b. Did his face glow from this encounter with God, just as it will when they are together on Sinai?
- F. These are the basic elements of the event. God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush.

III. But in what ways might the BUSH itself be used to speak TO us – OF us.

- A. Remember – God could have spoken and called to Moses in a hundred different ways.
1. But ***He chose*** to use ***YOU*** – I mean He chose to ***use this bush.***
 2. The Lord could have spoken with a still small voice, or He could have carved His message on a flat rock with a disembodied finger.
 3. He could have spoken with lightning or visibly with the Son of God riding up on a camel. But He didn’t.
 4. *“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” – I Cor. 1:21.*
 5. In God’s wisdom & sovereignty, He has chosen to use human instruments to speak to other human beings.

- B. In my study, I learned that **the Hebrew root** refers something **thorny** or **prickly**.
1. It was not a majestic cedar tree or even a wind-swept pine. It was not a tulip or even a prickly rose.
 - a. In this case, God's servant was a **thorny bush** – probably **without flowers** & maybe **without leaves**.
 - b. I wonder if it was even the same kind of thorn which pierced the scalp of my Saviour.
 2. But here is the point – you don't have to be a redwood tree, a rose or a tulip to be used by the Lord.
 3. **And** – if you wait to be made perfect – with dark, variegated, aromatic, silky leaves, you'll probably never do anything for the Lord's glory – you may miss the opportunity to fulfill your purpose.
 4. **I Corinthians 1** – *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*
 - a. *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*
 - b. *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*
 - c. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*
 - d. *That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”*
 5. Should we **ignore** our **scratchiness** – and look away from our **prickly natures**? Of course not.
 - a. We should strive to be the finest bush possible.
 - b. But let's not shy away from service because we aren't as beautiful as the violet or as tall as the cedar.
- C. And still in that regard, while the fire didn't go out, the bush was not consumed, however – was anything else?
1. If Br'er Rabbit had been hiding in that bramble, I guarantee he didn't stay long after God set it ablaze.
 - a. Were there any snakes lurking underneath? Were there any bugs in the branches?
 - b. There are insects which actually look like thorns, living on branches in order to catch their prey.
 2. Yes, the bush was not consumed, but there may have been some extraneous stuff burned away.
 3. And aren't there things in our lives, which shouldn't be there?
 4. Are there things which don't really belong? Are there things which hinder God's fire in you?
 5. If you are serious about being of service to the Lord – serious about burning for Christ – then don't be surprised when you find yourself losing some of the things which are unnecessary for His work and glory.
- D. Austin reminded us last Sunday that God sent Philip down into the desert to ask the Ethiopian, *“Understandest thou what thou readest?”*
1. That African man was perhaps not far from where this burning bush once stood.
 2. Why didn't someone meet that man in Jerusalem to give him the gospel when he was there?
 - a. Why couldn't he have shared his testimony to the church which Jesus established?
 - b. Why wasn't he immersed in the church baptistry in Jerusalem instead of in dirty oasis of water?
 - c. The reason, obviously – it was not God's will.
 3. The burning bush was exactly where it was supposed to be, because that was God's will.
 - a. And Philip and the Eunuch were in the place where they were supposed to be.
 - b. Do you think that perhaps the Ethiopian might not have returned home, if he had been saved in Jerusalem?
 - c. God controls every little detail of every little event – and He does so with His purpose in mind.
 4. If we have any desire to be useful to our Saviour, we need to be willing to go into the desert, or the swamp, or the Boreal forest – wherever the Lord wants us.
 5. We need to wake up every morning surrendering ourselves to the Lord, being willing to go, and to do, and to be whatever He asks – even if its nothing more than burning like a thorn bush.
- E. May I personify God's bush and say that it was willing to sacrifice itself in order to be of service.
1. There are few things men fear more than the threat of fire – a gun, yes; a knife perhaps more; but fire?
 2. It is one thing to be pierced by a bullet or a blade, but its quite something else to be consumed – eaten.
 3. That is one reason why our enemies loved to burn our forefathers, after torturing them with hot implements.

4. But if we truly yearn to be of service to God, we must be **willing** to be consumed.
5. **And yet**, most of the time, as it was with this bush, we are **not ACTUALLY consumed**.
6. The blessing of the Lord lay upon it such a way that, like the Eveready Bunny, it just kept on running.
7. This fire did not go out, and in that way it is like the fire of hell – the fire was not quenched.
8. In your service for God, remember – **you** are **not** the Lord's ministerial **fuel**.
 - a. Rather you are **the Lord's tool**.
 - b. And the fact is – it is He who burns through us – not we ourselves.

F. Here is a goofy question: **What did the bush say to Moses?**

1. It didn't talk about the hot weather – *"Boy, its so hot out here, I caught myself on fire."*
 - a. It didn't talk about the football game, or the NCAA tournament.
 - b. It didn't talk about the wicked new Pharaoh over there in Egypt.
2. What did it say? Absolutely nothing.
3. It was the Lord who spoke to Moses, but it was through the burning bush.
4. Moses said, *"I will now turn aside, and see this great sight,"* and then the Son of God addressed him.

G. If we want to be of service to Christ, and if we want to bring Him glory, then we need to step aside and let His Word speak.

1. It would probably be terrifying and even counter-productive if you opened your mouth and God actually used a voice other than yours to speak.
2. What I am saying is that God wants to use your voice, but the message must be Christ's.
3. It is *"the word of God (which) is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."*
4. It was the Word of God which brought Saul to his knees and Moses into eventual surrender.
5. And by the way, if the place where Moses stood was holy ground, then the place where the bush was planted was also holy ground.
6. We need to be the best and most surrendered bramble bush that we can be.

H. Here is perhaps a question even more goofy than the last one –

1. Whatever happened to that bush after the Lord's encounter with Moses?
 - a. We are told that it was not consumed as long as the Lord needed its service.
 - b. It glorified the Lord in ways that no other of God's creatures ever did or could.
2. But what happened when its service was over?
 - a. Did it become petrified, standing in that same spot forever? Is it still there?
 - b. Did the Lord take it Heaven? Is it enshrined in God's museum of useful tools?
 - c. Did it go the way of all flesh or the way of all cellulose and eventually turn to ash or dust?
3. It probably did return to the earth from which it was raised.
4. But I will say this – Moses remembered it and referred to it later. It was enshrined in history.
 - a. And Stephen referred to it with praise for its service.
 - b. And more importantly, the Lord Jesus never forgot that bush either.

I. It doesn't matter if you are an Apostle, a bush, an ass, or a colt the foal of an ass, the Lord will not forget your service.

1. *"For we (will) all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" – II Corinthians 5:10.*
2. *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" – I Corinthians 10:31.*
3. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" – I Corinthians 15:58.*
4. Even if you are nothing more than a bush, burning for the Saviour.