

Text: Heb. 12:25-29

Title: "Is your God a consuming fire?"

Time: 7/24/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - We all learned as children that it is not wise to play with fire. Fire requires proper respect, or someone is going to get burned. We had to follow some rules when it came to our burn pile. Those rules, when respected, protect us from harm.

At the Republican National Convention last Wednesday, a small group of communist protesters decided to burn the American flag. While doing so, one of them caught on fire. The police stepped in trying to help, and some of the officers were assaulted by the group of protestors. One officer had to explain to the protestor that he was on fire and needed help.

Our passage mentions a consuming fire. This fire is not to be toyed with. The fire mentioned is our God (v. 29). When our author tells us that our God is a consuming fire, he is reiterating a truth that Moses taught the children of Israel in Deut. 4:24. In verse 23 of that passage, Moses warns the people of God against creating an image of God that conforms to their own imagination, what is called *an idol*. And then he says in verse 24, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." So the consuming fire of God is that part of His nature that is jealous for His own glory among His creatures.

The god that man imagines for himself is not a consuming fire. That god glorifies man. He is a god of man's creation and man's convenience. He serves and worships man. He does for man what man wants - most recently, the approv-

al of homosexuality. But the true God of heaven, the God whom we have come to worship this morning, the God of the Bible, the God of Sinai and of Zion, the God of Calvary, the God of our salvation, our God is a consuming fire. He is jealous for His own glory.

Everything we are and do begins with what we truly believe about God. The decisions we make, the things we love, the motives we feel, the practices we develop, they all begin with either a false or a true impression of who and what God is. The ten commandments that came from Sinai certainly reflect this. They are consummate morality. They are all about getting life right, and they begin with four commandments about getting God right - (1) "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"; (2) "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"; (3) "Thou shalt not take God's name in vain"; and (4) "Remember to keep God's day holy." All right-living begins here, with getting God right.

So the challenge this passage puts to the morality of our hearts and lives as believers in Jesus Christ this morning could be put in the form of a very simply yes-or-no question: "Is our God a consuming fire?" Is our God jealous for His own glory? Is that what we believe about God? Is that the understanding of God that makes us who we are and causes us to do what we do? If it is, our passage tells us three things will also be true about our lives.

I. If our God is a consuming fire, we will know we need to escape Him (v. 25).

III: I read about the rescue of a Massachusetts man from a house fire early last Friday morning. Firefighters used thermal imaging technology to discover him in the bedroom of

the house, and when they reached him he was not breathing. They were able to get him out and revive him on the way to the hospital. Clearly, one of the things we know about consuming fires is that people need to be rescued from them; they need to escape.

Appl: When it came to the fire of Sinai, many did not escape. They did not escape because they refused the One speaking to them there. When Moses returned from his ascent up the mountain with the tables of God's commandments, he and Joshua thought that they heard war in the camp. It turned out to be a kind of music and dancing that sounded like war. God's people had made a golden calf, had called it *Jehovah*, and were worshipping it in debauchery and sin. Many did not escape God's jealousy for His own glory that day. They did not escape because they refused what the God of Sinai had to say.

Appl2: It turns out, however, that there is something worse than not listening to the God of Sinai. That is failing to listen to the God of Zion. When Moses spoke for God and people would not listen, Christ was promised to provide atonement for that sin. We have all sinned that way, and Christ died for our sins.

But when Christ speaks as our mediator and with sprinkled blood offering us the only way of salvation, and we refuse to listen to Him, there is no escape. Jesus speaks from heaven peace to the sinner: "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Have you listened? Have you come to Him for salvation? Are you still refusing Him who speaks from heaven? If your God is a consuming fire, you will know that you must escape Him, and you will know that trusting Christ to save you is the only way.

II. If our God is a consuming fire, we will know that much will not escape Him (vv. 26-28a).

III: No firefighter would claim to be able to save everything from fire. In every fire there is a lot that is lost. Firefighters come to a burning blaze prioritizing what must be saved and what is not worth saving. They are willing to risk their lives to save something truly worth saving, but their lives are too valuable to be sacrificed trying to save things not worth saving.

Appl: Our text is clear that when it comes to the judgment of our God, who is a consuming fire, there is much that will not be saved because it is not worth saving. Our author quotes from the passage we read this morning, Hag. 2:6, a prophecy that promises the glory of the future millennial temple in Jerusalem in the plan of God. Some of the older saints of Israel were saddened that the nation's temple upon their return from captivity was only a shadow of its former glory under Solomon.

The author reflects on that context and realizes that God is going to shake everything in heaven and earth one day. Everything made with human hands is going to crumble on that day. Nothing of this earthly existence shall escape God's jealousy for His own glory. And the day after that happens, only one thing will remain – the kingdom that cannot be moved (v. 28).

So what do we do about the fact that someday everything will crumble in the judgment of God except the kingdom that cannot be moved?

John counsels, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:15-14). Jesus put it this way: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal” (Matt. 6:19-20).

What is the treasure that will last forever? It is Christ’s kingdom – it is one another who are subjects of that kingdom and everyone whom we can bring with us into it. Are we wasting our days pursuing things that God says will all crumble one day? Have we laid up the treasure of any precious soul in heaven’s kingdom? If our God is a consuming fire, we will know that much will not escape Him, and we will give our lives not to those things, but to the things that will remain – the saving of souls as the spiritual treasures of the kingdom that cannot be moved.

III. If our God is a consuming fire, we will worship Him in an acceptable way (vv. 28b-29; *serve = worship*).

III: Fire is, of course, a great blessing. The fire of the sun warms our earth to temperatures perfect for the sustenance of life. We would be in sad shape without that fire. The most important thing you can do for your survival in the

wilderness is to get a fire going in your camp to keep you warm and dry.

Appl: We have noted that, when we read here that our God is a consuming fire, we are reading about the fact that God is jealous for His own glory. Well, being jealous for God's glory turns out to be the greatest blessing you and I could ever imagine or experience. Being jealous for His glory is the essence of getting God right and consequently of getting life right. No wonder Paul encouraged believers, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

To be jealous for God's glory, we must determine to worship Him in an acceptable way. There are two components of acceptable worship mentioned here, the kind of worship that is jealous for God's glory.

1. We must worship our God always on the basis of His grace. Our text says very simply, "let us have grace, whereby we may serve [or worship] God." We worship only by grace this morning. We do God no favors being here. We are here because He has done us a tremendous favor, which we do not deserve. He has given us His kingdom for free – we need only receive it (v. 28a). We could never earn it.

We come to worship this morning, not as critics of religion, but as the cause of our Lord's crucifixion. We come washed in His sprinkled blood. We come safe in His victorious mediation. We come deserving nothing but having everything in Christ. We worship this morning on the basis of grace alone. We are overwhelmed by His goodness and love to us. We engage energetically with a deep sense of blessing and privilege. We leave thankful and amazed by this amaz-

ing grace. We must worship our God always on the basis of His grace, or we have not worshipped at all.

2. We must worship our God always with reverence and fear. The word translated *reverence* here is used only twice in the NT, here and in Heb. 5:7, where it describes the example of our Lord in human flesh. His reverent life included (1) the refusal to glorify Himself (v. 5), (2) a fervent prayer life with tears (v. 7), and (3) faithful obedience (v. 8).

We ought to come to worship hoping to see these things happen in our lives in a greater way this morning. Reverence and fear characterize the attitude and decorum of biblical worship. It need not be ornate. Our time is very simple. But it is not a fun time; it is not an entertaining time; it is not a casual time. It is a time of humble reverence and godly fear.

You may notice that as a regular Baptist church we follow a regulative principle in our worship service. We worship only in those ways the Lord has prescribed specifically for us to worship Him: the preaching and hearing of God's Word; prophesying (testifying and musical ministry); prayer; our offerings; congregational psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; and the ordinances.

We also follow an order of service that includes adoration, confession, assurance, preparation, and response. These are elements that we find in Isaiah's encounter with the thrice-holy God, high and lifted up, in Isaiah 6. All this is very intentional. Not everyone will understand why we do what we do (one visitor said we pray too much). That is ok. Our God is a consuming fire, and we must worship Him in spirit and in truth, and in reverence and godly fear.

Conclusion: Is your God a consuming fire, or have you imagined an idol for yourself to worship instead? It is not wise to play with fire, and our God is a consuming fire. Have we toyed with the truth that God is jealous for His own glory? If so, how shall we escape, unless we repent and ask forgiveness, and amend our ways? May our lives reflect the worship and love of God as He truly is by the power of His Spirit's work in our hearts.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*