

Fan the Flames

In this morning's service I attempted to show how Christianity in America has become too entwined with the culture and has begun to lose its true calling. The Lord has called us to be a holy nation, set apart from the world. And like in the case of ancient Israel, when we tolerate evil, it will soon become more than tolerance and lead to outright rebellion against God.

We must never compromise our core principles, which are clearly written for us in God's holy word, because "Times change, but the truth does not."

But we have compromised in some areas. When was the last time you saw anyone preaching in the public square? You don't see it anymore because we're afraid of ridicule. When was the last time someone kneeled before God in this church building? Well, that's not necessary right? No, it's not, but "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:6) Do we come to church with enthusiasm and energy, or with a "ho hum, its church day again"? Where is the desire - the passion - to please God? Where is the fire? We are baptized with water, but also with "the Holy Spirit and fire."

I must admit, I'm a little bit of a fire bug. I think all men probably are. We like to start a fire from a little spark, and watch it grow into a roaring conflagration that will practically peel your skin if you get too close. Okay, maybe I'm a little more into it than most... Anyway, to get from a spark to a large fire, you have to tend to it. You don't want too much wind or it will blow out. You don't want to suffocate it with too much fuel and not enough oxygen. And if all you have on it is kindling, then it will burn itself out too quickly. Christianity is a FIRE in the heart of men. We've got the spark and a little flame going, but we're piling all kinds of big beefy logs on that fire just trying to get it going into a big huge flame that will sweep across the globe! And Satan is blowing a fierce wind trying to put it out.

So we've got to be careful. We need to take a step back and reassess the situation. Maybe start another spark over here, add some smaller pieces of wood ... it's a good time to get back into the Word and see what God would have us do to save this fire called Christianity.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of 2nd Timothy, Chapter 1 where the Apostle Paul is giving some advice to his young protégé. 2 Timothy 1 starting with verse 6:

I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Paul is one of the most amazing writers in all of history, clearly inspired, in just these 8 verses, he has painted for us this grand picture of his great joy in suffering for Christ and also the love he has for Timothy. He is obviously in jail, and worried that it may be affecting Timothy's ministry.

Paul knows how fragile a new Christian's faith can be. He realizes that the fire (the power of the Holy Spirit) in Timothy is in danger of going out. In verse 6 he tells Timothy to "fan into flame" the gift of God - that is the Holy Spirit. Fire sometimes needs a little pick-me-up of oxygen, in order to get more oxygen to the fire you have to fan the flames. The way you fan the flame of the Spirit is to study God's Word. God's Word is food for the soul - fuel for the fire of the Spirit. 2 Timothy 2:15

We know and Paul knows, that the Spirit God gave us is not a wimpy spirit, but a spirit POWER, LOVE and SELF-DISCIPLINE. Fire is not a toy. If you play with fire you are bound to get burned right. So we are not to play around with what God has given us. The Spirit is here to give us courage, to teach us, to comfort us, but never to serve us as some magical fairy godmother. We must study the Word to allow this fire to grow and give us power over evil, love for one another, and the discipline to turn away from temptation. This rings true in my spiritual life. I have never read the Bible completely through. I've read the New Testament, and possibly 95% of the Old Testament, but back in January I started and have kept up with the Bible reading plan David made available. And I tell you what, my self-discipline has improved. And I don't think its coincidental that I got promoted at work and became a

deacon here. God entrusts more to those that show they can do more with what he gives them.

Many places in the Bible, God has likened himself to a refiner of precious metals. The refiner requires an extremely hot fire in order to melt down the metal. Once melted, the impurities (the dross) rises to the top and can be skimmed off. God is hard at work in every one of you, using the Holy Spirit to refine and shape you into pure and precious gold. But you have to fan the flames of that fire. You have to quit being lukewarm (as we talked about this morning) and start getting HOT for God.

Do you know what the scariest thing about fire is? How quickly it spreads. It can go from a tiny little flame to an out-of-control wild fire in a matter of minutes on a windy day. What is frightening about the chemical reaction we call fire, is the most wonderful aspect of God's Holy Spirit fire dwelling in us. We can begin sharing our story of how God saved us to our neighbors, our friends and relatives and Christianity can again spread across this land as a raging fire. But we must not be ashamed of testifying about our Lord, or those that suffer for it. The last command Jesus gave his disciples before he ascended into heaven on a cloud was to "go and make disciples" and "teach them to obey everything I commanded you." Every Christian can do this, and should do this. Indeed, "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:10)

Paul was not ashamed of anything he had ever done for Christ, because in his own words, "I know who I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." He had studied the word, first as a devout Pharisee, then as a devout Christian, and he could say with complete confidence that Christ is able to, on the Day of Judgment, raise him from the dead and bring him into heaven. He had staked his life on it. We should be so convinced as Paul! Yet without studying God's Word it will never happen.

Once you know how to start a fire the right way, you should pass it on. I believe I read it in Popular Mechanics, that one of the 100 things all men should know is how to start a fire. Paul told Timothy to take "what you heard from me and keep it as sound teaching." There are many ways to build a fire and keep it going, just as there are many methods of teaching, but the meat and potatoes of the faith, the Word, never changes. Remember from this morning? Times change, but the truth does not! Keep the truth as sound teaching and you will always have a firm foundation in which to spread the Word to others.

Finally, the fierce wind that Satan is blowing in your direction threatens to snuff out the fire in your heart and the hearts of those you have spread the fire to. Therefore you must guard the fire. Put up a barrier so the wind cannot blow out the flame before it really gets

going. The Holy Spirit can help us guard the things God entrusted to us. You are not going to block Satan on your own, he's way too crafty, way too powerful for you to resist on your own. So let the Spirit guard your heart from that evil serpent. Jesus said, "trust in God, trust also in me." Don't try to be ole Johnny from Georgia and out fiddle the devil, "cause if you lose the devil gets yer soul." (That was for you Charlie Daniels fans out there.) Instead, surrender yourself to God and obey his commands and you can say as the Psalmist says in chapter 118 verse 7, "The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph over my enemies."

Christianity is a fire in the heart of men. We must fan the flame to keep it going, continually studying the Word of God, so that we may be thoroughly equipped to spread the gospel and humble enough to recognize that we need God to guard and protect it.

If there are any among us tonight that want God to spark that fire in their heart for the first time, or if you feel that you have allowed the flame to be extinguished, or if it needs a good fanning, please come forward now.