**KEEPERS OF THE FIRE**

**LEVITICUS 6:8-13; 9:24**

 Fire has long been regarded as a *symbol* of the Lord’s presence and the *instrument* of His power.

 The flame of fire has been considered to be an emblem of the divine Spirit by pagans, Jews, and Christians.

 God revealed Himself to Moses in a blazing bush.

 His presence led Israel from Egypt and through the wilderness in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

 Christ shall come again in “flaming fire.”—(II Thess. 1:8).

 Deuteronomy 4:24 proclaims, “*For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire*…”

 Fire upon the altar of Israel indicated divine approval and acceptance of the sacrifice.

 When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal for a showdown on Mt. Carmel, his proposition was: “*and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.*”—(I Kings 18:24).

 Fire fell from heaven and consumed Elijah’s sacrifice, while the sacrifice of the prophets of Baal was ignored.

 But what did God first choose to fall upon in the OT?

**I. A COMPLETE SACRIFICE**

 After the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, when all arrangements for the first formal sacrifices had been made and the offerings had been placed in order on the altar, “*And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.*”—(Lev. 9:24).

 The fire was of supernatural origin and appeared spontaneously.

 It consumed the sacrifice.

 This sacrifice was the Burnt Offering.

 It was the one which was to be made every morning and every evening.

 The Burnt Offering was unique in that it was the one where the whole animal was placed on the altar.

 On some of the offerings the priest got a portion of it—not this one.

 On some of the offerings the people themselves were able to partake of a portion of it—not this one.

 This one was reserved for God.

 It was a sign of *complete* consecration and surrender!

 When we surrender ourselves to the Lord, we put “*all on the altar*” and hold back nothing.

 Years ago a young man auditioned for a job at a radio station. Thrilled with his singing, the officials that heard him offered him a flattering contract to sing on their station.

 But when he heard that he would have to sing popular songs, not gospel songs, he was terribly troubled.

 Faced with the decision to sing or not for the radio station, he went to the piano and wrote a song that expressed his choice.

 That singer was George Beverly Shea. Here’s the song he wrote, “*I’d rather have Jesus than world wide fame. I’d rather be true to His dear name.*”

 What is your “THAN”?

 Is everything in order on your altar?

 God will not send His fire upon a sacrifice that is not complete.

**II. KEEP IT CONTINUING**

 It was a *sacred* moment to the Israelites when they saw that *holy* flame descend upon their sacrifice.

 They knew God was pleased, that their sins were *forgiven*, and that in accepting their sacrifices, God had accepted them.

 The New Testament counterpart of this beautiful lesson is the witness of the Spirit.

 Romans 8:16, “*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*”

 They regarded the sacred fire with holy awe as a manifestation of the divine Presence.

 It was an event never to be forgotten.

 I never want to forget the day that God saved me and put His hand upon my life!

 With so great a *revelation* of God’s presence and patience, came an accompanying **responsibility**.

 “*And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings.* 13 *The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar****; it shall never go out.***”—(Lev. 6:12-13).

 The flame was to burn continually.

 It was a *perpetual* reminder of the grace of God in forgiving sins.

 The sight of it should *stir up* praise and thanksgiving.

 It should be a continual incentive to consecration and holy living.

 By the same token, the spiritual fire, the abiding Spirit, should never be allowed to go out; it requires *daily* renewal.

 It was not enough that there should be an *instantaneous* flash of fire.

 God said, “*it shall never go out.*”

 The fire upon the altar had to be kept burning continually because God had started it.

 While the believer has went to Calvary and partook of that sacrifice, thenceforth, however, he is to present himself a “living sacrifice” and thus *perpetuate* and *fan* the spiritual fire.

 A flame that does not spread is one that *sizzles* out!

 The Christian is obligated to keep the spiritual fire burning, because this kind of fire alone can bring warmth to a *cold*, *barren*, *godless* society.

 *Cold* hearts, *frigid* personalities with *frosted* tongues, and *chilled* experiences have nothing with which to meet the challenges of our day.

 They need to be exposed to the fire of God.

 *Soul-less* oratory and *loveless* religiosity cannot satisfactorily minister to the soul who is starving for the love of God.

 There is no substitute for the personal burning flame, not for the hearts that are warm with the Spirit of God.

 The **disciples** of Jesus were a very cold-hearted team to go out and execute the Great Commission, in spite, of their *daily* association with the Lord.

 They were willing to turn a *cold* shoulder to the hungry multitudes.

 They gave their *icy* rebuke to those who would bring their little children to Jesus to bless.

 They tried to *douse* the flames of Mary’s extravagant love in breaking the alabaster box of perfume to anoint Jesus.

 When the woman of Canaan with the demon-possessed daughter came to Jesus for help the disciples said, “*Send her away; for she crieth after us.*”—(Matthew 15:23).

 Jesus had to rebuke them time and again for their *cold*, *heartless* attitude.

 Spiritual coldness fosters indifference and divisiveness.

 We begin to get an “*I don’t care attitude*.”

 We begin to nit-pick and complain.

 Spiritual warmth is the *antidote* for these ill effects.

 We must *steadily* and *unfailingly* maintain the burning fire that God has ignited in our hearts.
 It must never go out!
 We must not allow the *ashes* from the world to choke it out.
 We must not allow the *passions* of youth to snuff it out.
 We must not allow the *pressures* of this life to extinguish it.
 We must not allow the *distressing doubts* placed there by the enemy to put it out.
 We must not allow the *comforts of this life* to smother it out.
 We must not allow the *deceitfulness of riches* to blow it out.
 We must not allow the *tragedies of life* to flood over the fire and put it out.

 The demand for perpetual fire upon the altar shows that God wants us to worship Him with *consistent* devotion and not *sporadic* enthusiasm.

 If we worship only when we “*feel*” like it, then it really isn’t worship...

 The New Testament fulfillment of this is seen in Romans 12:11, “*fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;*”

 It means to keep the fire burning.

 Vance Havner said, “The early Christians did not need a shot in the arm every Sunday to keep them going. They knew Jesus and they *upset* the world and *worried* the devil and gave wicked rulers *insomnia* **and** started something that jails couldn’t *lock up*, fire couldn’t *burn*, water couldn’t *drown*, swords couldn’t *kill*. This world has never been moved by cold, calculating brass hats but by fools, with their facts on *fire*.
 “You may *belittle* experience and speak of the *dangers* of emotion, but we are suffering today from a species of Christianity as dry as *dust*, as cold as *ice*, as pale as a *corpse*, and as dead as *King Tut*. We are suffering not from a lack of *correct* heads but of *consumed* hearts.”

 The fire was ever burning.—Look at the Apostle Paul.

 Loneliness didn’t put it out.

 Hardship didn’t put it out.

 A period of long waiting didn’t cause it to wane in the least.

 Lack of ministry opportunities didn’t water it down.

 Financial suffering didn’t dim it.

 An obscure location didn’t stifle it, and he never had a mentor to stir it up.

 **What’s your excuse?**

 As long as you continue to *hold on* to one, you will never have the fire like you ought to.

 Fire is an individual thing, you don’t need to make excuses for yourself, that will never bring the fire.

 We need to repent for our lack of fire, and that we let things that we shouldn’t have, *put out* our fire.

 We can’t blame our *church*, our *fellowship*, our *pastor*, or our *situation* for our lack of fire, the Word shows us otherwise.

 Paul sang in prison after being maliciously beaten and whipped.

 Job blessed God after the death of all his children.

 Joseph walked in integrity after being almost murdered by his brothers, sold into slavery and falsely accused and imprisoned.

 Moses kept the fire when his church was split by insurrection and rebellion.

 David kept the fire when he was chased all over Israel by the demon possessed Saul.

 Steven kept the fire, even as Jewish trouble-makers stoned him to death.

 Jeremiah kept the fire even though no one liked his preaching. At one point he tried to resign, but the fire shut up in his bones, *shook* him from his battle fatigue and *stirred* him anew, until at last he yielded to the fire and preached the word of God again.

 We have a responsibility to keep it burning!

**III.** **THE CLEANING UP**

 Ashes will keep a fire from burning cleanly.

 The priest’s eye would need to be often turned to the altar fire: “*every morning*” it needed care.

 We had a fire place growing up and a couple of times a week we had to empty the ashes or there would have been no room in the fireplace to put new logs in.

 We had to get rid of the *old* remains so that the new would burn.

 Ashes come from what will not burn completely in a fire.

 The ashes from a fire will not *ascend* upward.

 Notice that the ashes were to be *taken outside* the camp to be discarded. (vs. 1)

 The ashes in our fires come from *sin*, *selfishness*, *defilement*, *corruption* and so on.

 A fire will burn brightest and hottest when it is kept free from ashes.

 This necessitated a regular removal of the ashes to the clean place selected for their reception without the camp.

 These ashes represented what *would* *not ascend* in the fire, and were a fitting symbol of the dross and corruption which attaches to all human services.

 Everything which would prevent the fire from burning was to be removed.

 What is keeping your fire from burning?

**IV. THE COLLECTING (vs. 12)**

 The fire was to be *tended* daily because the sacrifices were to be offered daily in the morning and evening. (see Exodus 29:38-43)

 The wood was to be supplied for the fire every morning (12).

 Fires that may have burned *brightly*, roared *loudly*, and leaped *to the sky* have a way of **burning low** and even **going out**.

 This is true of spiritual fires as it is of natural fires.

 They are not necessarily put out by design.

 They go out because they are left *unattended*, left *alone*, and lack fuel.

 In the case of Christian experience, the fire often burns low, and sometimes is extinguished, because fuel has *not* been *added*.

 Other times, the fire *diminishes* or *dies* because the sacrifice has been *removed* from the altar.

 Sometimes the fire goes out from sheer neglect.

 It is a sad time, when one has to admit that the fire has gone out and there is no more zeal for the Lord.

 **A fireless altar is a Godless altar.**

 Absence of spiritual fire is the testimony of a rejected altar.

 It is no longer acceptable to God.

 Paul told Timothy, “*Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*”—( II Tim. 1:6).

 The responsibility, which belongs to us as custodians of a light that may be dimmed or desecrated in our keeping.

 Let us seek to *fan* the flame.

 Let’s *chuck* some chunks of wood on it.

 Jesus said of John the Baptist, “*He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.*”—(John 5:35).

 What an eulogy!

 What an epitaph!

 The motto on David Brainerd’s banner, and the prayer in his heart, ever was, “*Oh, that I were a flaming fire in the service of my God*.”

 We have as a model Jesus Christ who prophecy said, “*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*”—(John 2:17).

 Then there are two things in the text — “fire” and “altar.”

 We may have an altar, but no fire. That is the deadly possibility; that is the fatal reality.

 The world is not dying for *want* of a creed, but for want of faith.

 Of what avail is it that we have *filled* the grate with fuel if we have not *applied* the flame?

 Does the unlighted fuel warm the room?

 We need the fires of fervor—until we are enthused.

 We need the fires of fury. It is not enough, right as it is, to love what is *good*. We must hate, we must spurn the *evil*.

 We need the fires of faith—personal holiness, consistent daily walk.

 Whenever the fire burns, the light is aglow.

 It will be a light to the *weary* seafarer on the *uncharted* ocean of time.

 If the gospel is to have a mighty effect upon the congregation, it must pass through the fire of an intense spiritual life in the preacher.

 If hard hearts are to be won for Jesus, they must be melted, not hammered.

 Leonard Ravenhill said, “*I believe that tonight the world is going to hell fire because the church has lost Holy Ghost fire, it’s as simple as that.*”

**CON:**

 Your fire can expire!

 Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David built altars.

 Luke 3:16, “*he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:*”

 “What will our great great-great-grandchildren sit around instead of our household fire?”

PREPARED BY: BRO. JAYME D. CARTER