

Fireworks

Rummaging through the old filing cabinet, I discovered a real treasure. It was a letter from Dad – something that was incredibly rare in and of itself. But its treasure wasn't so much in its uniqueness as in its precious content. Dad was almost never expressive to me in person; however, his note said something that touched my heart in a very powerful way.

You see, some years before his missive, at the age of 19, I had come to know Jesus as my Savior. The circumstances of my conversion, though, were such that he was skeptical – and with just cause! I had subsequently dropped out of school, given away everything I had, raved about the Lord without real compassion or understanding – in short, behaved in a way that though sincere, would have 'short-circuited' nearly any Dad.

But our Father in heaven is oh so faithful to change us, isn't He? And it's one aspect of His gracious transforming process that we'll consider herein – that is, the fire.

Fire? Yes, fire, flames, furnaces – real heat! From very early on, fire has been a key concept and picture of God's character and method. In fact, there are more than 600 mentions of it in scripture. We find a flaming sword guarding the way into paradise after Adam and Eve were sent out. We read that Abraham was to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. We see God revealing Himself to Moses in a burning bush. We note that all the Old Testament

sacrifices pertaining to sin and utter devotion were made by fire.

The Bible even says that our God is Himself a consuming fire (Deut 4:24, Heb 12:29) and that His surroundings are fiery:

"Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace..." (Ex 19:18) and...

"I watched till thrones were put in place and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him..." (Dan 7: 9,10)

From Isaiah 43:2, we also see that it plays an important prophetic role for the Jewish people, *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you."* In other words, God has brought them through the Red Sea, the Jordan River and soon, the fire of the seven year Tribulation period (literally and in type).

In fact, it is **these very fires** which will bring forth the believing remnant of Jews:

"So the Light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day...and it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again

depend on him who defeated (or smote) them (trust in the Antichrist?); but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land." (Isa 10:17, 20-23)

"I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" (Zech 13:9)

In addition, fire is often a part of God's judgment (See Isa 66:15) – it rained down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. It consumed Nadab and Abihu, the errant sons of Aaron. It came down upon the enemies of Elijah and will be the ultimate place of torment for Satan and his followers.

As for the coming of the LORD, the scripture says, *"For behold, the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to rend His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will judge all flesh..."* (Isa 66:15, 16)

So fire is somewhat of an enigma. It seems, at the same time, to be holy and yet terrible, a means of protection and of destruction, of inspiration and of perspiration. But then, as we look more closely, we realize that the fire is not really the one that is precocious – sometimes this way and sometimes that. Rather, it is we who are flippant,

disjoint and askew. We note that fire is a terror to the flesh, the carnal, the proud, the sinful. But to the pure in heart, fire is not threat; in fact, it is 'friendly'.

In a frightening foreign land, three young men found themselves face to face with the most powerful man on earth. Far from home and families, they were being tested before all – it was bow or burn. You know the story – they even made a 'Veggie-tale' on it (See Daniel 3).

The king had made a huge golden image and commanded all his subjects to bow and worship before it. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, though, were the only ones who refused to do so. At the sound of the band, everyone else put the preservation of their life first and punctually prostrated themselves. These three, however, would only worship Jehovah and stood alone, literally.

Then, in response to the king's angry threat to make them crispy-critters, they revealed a wonderful purity of heart. They said, *"...our God whom we serve is **able to deliver us** from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver [us] from your hand, O king. **But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."*** (Dan 3:17, 18)

Of course, the king was furious and commanded the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual. The three men were then bound in their clothing and cast into the flames.

This story is so rich in prophetic implication regarding the Jewish

people, Jesus Christ and the fires of "Jacob's trouble" (See Jeremiah 30:7) – the Tribulation which is fast approaching. But our topic herein is the fire's effect upon Christians.

The heat of the furnace instantly killed those who tossed the three Hebrew men into it – such is the work of the flame upon the flesh – it consumes. All that is of this earth is subject to its force. Nothing worldly survives it. Nothing.

And momentarily, the three were free in the fire – walking around unbound in the furnace -- that which bound them reduced to ashes. So it is for God's family, the faithful and pure in heart, redeemed not by works but by faith in Christ.

"It is precisely there, in the heat of the fire, we are to glorify Him. We do this by exercising perfect faith in His goodness and love that has permitted this trial to come upon us. Even more, we are to believe that out of the fire will arise something more worthy of praise to Him than had we never experienced it."

"This is the real triumph – triumphing over sickness in it, triumphing over death in dying, and triumphing over other adverse circumstances in them."

"Christ's triumph was in His humiliation. And perhaps our triumph will also be revealed through what others see as humiliation." – Margaret Bottome

Everyone's work will be tried by fire and the fire will reveal its true nature – what is carnal will be consumed, what is spiritual will be spared. If you are born again in Christ, you never need fear the furnace. Oh, the flame will come, it comes to all – both spiritually and

one day physically (See 2 Pet 3:10-12). But in truth, only that which binds you will be consumed.

Now, we can so easily be misled in our endeavors – sheep are not noted for their IQ's. This material world can become so important – even well meaning ministers can be bound by misguided ministries or ministeries. Much that we can think of as church just isn't, and some that we think isn't is. God knows and the fire is absolutely discerning.

And not only does it free, but it fascinates. The king was shocked – he was astonished. He said, *"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ...Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."* (Dan 3:25)

The effect of the fire upon God's children is mind-boggling to the world. The freedom is obvious and they can perceive that although some things are burned up, we are not hurt. For right there with us is the Son of God; it is, after all, His fire – not the world's.

"Isn't there something captivating about the sight of a person burdened with many trials, yet who is as lighthearted as the sound of a bell? Isn't there something contagious and valiant in seeing others who are greatly tempted but are "more than conquerors" (Rom 8:37)? Isn't it heartening to see a fellow traveler whose body is broken, yet who retains the splendor of unbroken patience?" -- John Henry Jowett

*"Glorify ye the Lord **in** the fires..."* (Isa 24:15)

Yes, the fire frees, it fascinates, and it fashions our fellowship for there in

that furnace, when all that binds is burned, we find contentment – not resentment. You see, the king had to command them to come out – they were in no hurry to leave! When the flames unveil the ultimate friendship – Jesus Christ – no one wants the old dead world again. And sometimes it takes the fire to open our eyes.

Are you fighting fires? Let them burn! Oh, there's no need to 'fan the flames', but do let them burn.

'Oh, I can't stand to lose this or that, him or her,' you may think. (swat, swat, swat) Let it burn. Let God's fire burn. And yet, that's not to say do nothing. On the contrary, do all you know to do that is good – stand up to the king so to speak. Just don't bow down to anything in this world in order to preserve that which is going to burn anyway. Don't try to put out God's fire.

Now the enemy of your soul has some fiery darts (See Eph 6:16) that he lobbs at you from a distance but the difference is obvious for his odorous hell-fire only serves to empower the flesh – to enflame with hatred, bitterness, passion and pride. But faith extinguishes his pettiness and is itself purified unto praise by the fire God sends.

Anyway, Dad's letter read, *"In your search for the more important and meaningful things in life, you were most sorely tried and tested. Many weakened and lost touch with the true reality of the love of God and His Son, Jesus. And even though you had an experience that was truly a nightmare in many ways, you and Darlene won out in the end with great victories, both personally and through the Lord... [now] you live in the confidence of a renewed and more*

substantial commitment to the Lord Jesus... God grant that you can hold on this wonderful course... Always, you will have our love and prayers..."

Wow. Even now, 20 years later, thanks, Dad.

Yes, let God's fire burn. Consider that burning a blessing. You need not fear it nor fight it for God uses it only for His good purposes – to free you and to transform you in it (See Psalm 104:4). True, the way back into 'Eden' involves a flaming sword, but there is fellowship in the fire like no other and joy is set before you.

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Pet 4:12,13)

"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" -- Jesus (Luke 12:49)

"...each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." (1 Cor 3:13)

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ..." (1 Pet 1:6,7)