

# Faith and Works VI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

# Moving with Moses

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## **Introduction**

The man Moses at his death was revered as one of the most humble of men, and yet, he walked in authority as perhaps one of the most powerful prophets of the living God. What were the contrasts between our own cultural expectations for greatness, and the events that led to the shaping of the character of the man Moses to prepare him for the work to which God had called him?

## **Moses Begins His Ministry**

Many times people will seek the leading of God. Some do so with a destination of their own in mind. Others have come to the place where they truly are seeking God's will and direction for their lives. And sometimes the leading and direction that comes, leads nowhere.

### **Exodus 4:25-26**

*Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!" — because of the circumcision.*

Her husband was once a man with great potential and opportunities, but after a rash action that had caused him to run for his life from the position and status he once knew in the palaces of Egypt, for the next forty years he had tended flocks for her father, a priest, and had become one of her tribe. Moses slowly lost the habits and behavior of one born in the palace of a king, and even becoming unfamiliar due to lack of practice with the language spoken in the country into which he was born and educated. Resigned to his failure, yet never free from the burden for his kinsmen who were still under bondage, he had come to expect no more than to live out the remainder of his life tending flocks along with his wife's people.

And then one day Moses had come home with a strange story about a burning bush, and a commission from God to free his people. She had to choose her husband over her people, to leave her social group, and journey into the wilderness with her family following a man who was no longer a member of Pharaoh's household, but was now merely a shepherd. Did she want to leave the security and familiarity of her community? Perhaps feeling cursed with ill fortune, she now is informed by her husband that their children are to be mutilated with a sign that indicates they have failed in covenant with this new god, and but for the mercy of that god, they are taking a sign that symbolizes that they are not even

deserving of offspring, that they are already guilty of breaking covenant with the new god that Moses now follows.

Circumcision and Baptism both have in common the beginning point of submission before God and acknowledgement of our complete failure before God. In Baptism, one is immersed in water, symbolizing the very grave itself. The Bible speaks of how death has reigned since the fall of man. Death has not been avoided by our good works, and we are deserving of death, for by the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified. Without the counter part to the Law of Moses, the daily shedding of blood at the temple, there is no remission of sins. Even the high priest could not approach God without the sprinkling of Blood. When the individual then immerges from the water, it symbolizes that not by our own strength, but only by the grace, mercy and power of God, are we raised in new life.

## **When the Truth Hurts**

A women's orientation often will be to center herself on the focal point of the local community. Some speculate this may be innate behavior to ensure a support group for the purposes of nurturing and rearing offspring. We are all, as followers of Christ, men and women alike, challenged to not be group followers, seeking self affirmation from the external appraisal of our peers. If we are seeking the Lord in order to build the perfect environment to ensure our old nature is secure, we are building on the wrong foundation and traveling on the wrong road.

### **Matt. 8:19-20**

*Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

### **Matt. 7:13**

*"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."*

### **Matt. 10:34-39**

*"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*

**Col. 3:1-4**

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Our heart is not always in line with God's will, as witnessed by the many false prophets of Jeremiah's day who prophesied, in sincerity it seems, out of their own hearts and the dreams they themselves caused themselves to dream. We often want growing in the Grace and knowledge of God to increase our control of the tribulations of this life, to even avoid the cross.

**Jeremiah 5:12**

*They have lied about the LORD, And said, "It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. And the prophets become wind, for the word is not in them.*

**Jeremiah 6:14**

*They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.*

We must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and be able to use the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, to cut between soul and spirit, bone and flesh. The mind set on the spirit is life and peace; the mind set on the flesh is death.

## **Finding True Strength**

We can and often do spend a lot of time condemning ourselves for our failure to be perfect, but unfortunately, that is a way the flesh holds onto itself, remains in control.

### **Colossians 2:20-23**

*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations — “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

Why did Jesus tell the Laodiceans that they should seek the fire? And does not the writer of Hebrews teach that God disciplines those who are not illegitimate children? And in John, does not Jesus say that the Father prunes those who bear fruit, and cuts off those who do not?

Moses thought his life and significance were over because he no longer was defined by the context of Egypt. He was now an outlaw and outcast from the very system that had once defined his greatness and potential, the foundation from which he had derived his status and success.

When Moses had spent enough time in the desert to realize that despite his opportunities in the flesh being in Pharaoh's household, that he belonged in the desert, it was then that God showed Moses the burning bush (2 Chron. 16:9).

**Exodus 3: 1-3**

*Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."*

## **The Wilderness**

The wilderness is a place with no agendas, and no goals. It is empty and void of presuppositions. Truth, when it is found in the wilderness, will be seen for what it is, and will not be resisted, for in the wilderness, there is no agenda or pre-requisite for what will be accepted as truth.

Too often, full of youthful enthusiasm with a goal to succeed according to goals set by their culture in which they seek to authenticate their very identity, striving to be the best they can be, those who are seeking their higher learning have their goals set by those who have determined according to their own agenda what things are important, what propositions must be in place to uphold and reinforce the structure of doctrine or philosophy that defines and guides the given institution that provides the foundation of the current leadership. Truth often becomes subservient to the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the institution sustained by its own definition of truth, rather than truth maintaining its own integrity.

Due to the disposition of our fallen nature, we will normally identify truth as that which meets the approval of the leadership or group consensus, even if it is lead by a commercial, political or religious authority of the given community with which we wish to associate, rather than seeking truth for its own sake.

The wilderness is the place where these influences fall off, where we finally seek, with all our heat, soul, mind and strength, a city whose builder and foundation is God Himself, drawing all together in union through Christ with Him, even the lost sheep who are the descendents of the fallen first Adam.

## John in the Wilderness

### Matthew 3:1-3

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:*

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"*

The ministry of John the Baptist took place in the wilderness. He did not preach his message in the middle of the Temple, the heart of cultural religion, and he did not teach in the prominent religious schools of the day. To do either would have required his message to appeal on the bases and be judged by the standards the men had come to use to justify their religious practices, and ultimately, the hope and confidence they had that their works had appeased God's standards for granting blessing and eternal life.

In such a cultural setting, those who were rich and successful, who enjoyed good health, we assumed to be pleasing to God. Those who were poor, ill, those tormented by the devil were assumed to have brought the judgment of God upon themselves.

John's message was not to those who trusted in themselves and their own righteousness. His message was for those who no longer sought the security and comfort of the cultural religious consensus. John was preaching and baptizing those who were, like Abraham, seeking a true relationship with God, and additionally, those who understood that their own works had failed to allow them to enter into that relationship.

This was an especially hard message for those who prided themselves in their accomplishments in the cultural religion of the day. For John was performing a Mikveh, a ritual that would not have applied to anyone perfected by observance of the religious works of the Pharisees, yet John was calling all of them out of that

system, to a place where symbolically, in the emersion of the waters, they were essentially being asked to repent of dead religious works, to admit they were yet sinners before God, and to begin anew as they came out of the waters of the ritual of the Mikveh, or baptism.

### **Matthew 3:4-12**

*Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees.*

*Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

So we see the setting of the wilderness was essential to bringing men out of the comfort and context of cultural assumptions about their religious standing before God. Too often our culture reinforces and accommodates the notion that we can be good, and that when we are rich in material goods, and men praise us, we can rest content. Yet all these things can keep our hearts distracted from the emptiness that has yet to be filled by a true relationship with its Creator.

## Jesus in the Wilderness

The devil tried to tempt Jesus by attempting to get Jesus to focus on the work He was to do as Messiah. The believer in Christ can often get off balance, and no longer work from the strength of who the believer is in Christ, but instead, mistake the success of our work for God as the place from which we draw our self confidence.

### **Matthew 4:1-4**

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*

*But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

But Jesus had come, not to establish His own purpose through His work, but instead, to lay down His life in surrender to the work of the Father, trusting not in the work He was to do as the bases of His relationship with the Father, but first and foremost working because of His trust in the Father and His love. In this Jesus fulfilled the greatest law – that man is to love God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus was in the wilderness letting go of man's ideas of success and even man's idea of the kingdom of God. He lived by every word of God regardless of the circumstances. When they came to try and make Jesus a king before the appointed time when He was to ride into Jerusalem hailed as the Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecy given to Daniel, Jesus would withdraw from the crowds, knowing the role that that they envisioned failed to understand the position God intended for Him on the other side of the cross, that man's ideas of greatness and the kingdom would be a hindrance to the work He was to perform to take away the sins of the world.

If the goal of religion is simply seen as a means of gain in the worldly goods in which the natural without God seeks comfort, that religion will actually hinder man's realization of the need to be reconciled to God.

**Luke 18:9-14**

*Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

## **Paul in the Wilderness**

Paul spoke of coming to the place where his identity and security was no longer supported by the world system. That in a sense, whether in a prison or palace, in his inner man, Paul was always seeking to come to a place that would seem to be a wilderness to those seeking comfort and security in their works and the things of this world. Even those things that men praise as good works, Paul no longer would trust in, for he was leaving the camp, seeking a city whose builder and foundation was God Himself.

### **Philippians 3:7-16**

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

We see this same theme, this same understanding of the believer's separation from the orientation and mindset of the fallen world system and the

exodus of re-orientation, the renewing of the mind, the identification with Christ and His cause to become a citizen of the kingdom of God, indeed, a member of God's very household through union with God in Christ, taught in the New Testament letter written to the Hebrews.

### **Hebrews 11:8-10**

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

### **Hebrews 11:13-16**

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

### **Hebrews 13:12-14**

*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*

## Hearing God in the Wilderness

### Hebrews 11:24-27

*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*

While the above scripture describes the spiritual aspect of how Moses left Egypt, yet he did so before he had truly been introduced to the God of his forefathers. Moses had chosen to identify with the people of God and his forefathers rather than Pharaoh's household, but when he attempted to act based on the position and authority he had as a member of Pharaoh's household, he became a fugitive, and had to leave Egypt to spend 40 years in the wilderness of Midian.

Moses was in the wilderness so long, he was not even sure if he could still remember how to speak the language of Egypt. He was in the wilderness so long, he no longer heard the voices and opinions of his past culture and society that so often is internalized in our minds through repetition and our desire to fit in and meet the standards of the group in which we seek to find our identity and affirmation.

In the silence of the wilderness Moses had even run out of words to speak to himself. It was then the Lord appears to Moses. Moses is spent, consumed; he has come to the end of himself, and the potential according to the world's estimation of greatness.

It is there God meets Moses and begins with the basic fundamental point at which we truly begin to hear and learn of God from His voice, and the revelation of His word. God tells Moses, "I am that I am". He is not what we expect, not what we think we need to continue in the strength of our own flesh. He is who He is,

and to see and understand Him thus we must stop looking for a God who fits in with the agenda of fallen man to sustain himself, or to seek to obligate God through man's works, or to become as God. God is not going to help us with that program. God does not change His mind when He says something, and He had told Adam, in the day you eat of the fruit, you will surely die.

“Who will separate me from the body of this death?” asked the apostle Paul. Our problem is not how to improve the quality of our religious or spiritual works; our problem is the fallen nature we have inherited from the first Adam which results in our works being as filthy rags. The Bible tells us that by the works of the law, shall no flesh be justified. We have an incurable wound. The law is not a recipe to restore our lost union with God, instead it has come to condemn us, to reveal our fallen nature, to expose our inherit enmity with God.

While men typically seek the power of God for themselves or power over God on their own behalf, yet the eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the earth seeking those on whose behalf He may be strong. Paul spoke of coming to the place where he no longer sought to trust in the arm of his own flesh, no longer sought God to strengthen him in his mortal carnal man, but instead Paul sought to rely on God' own strength, no longer putting confidence in the flesh, leaving his old nature that he inherited form the fallen first Adam by faith crucified on the cross with Christ.

### **Galatians 2:19-21**

*For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”*

## **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

*And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

## **Philippians 3:7-11**

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

This was surly the death to the old fallen nature that Jesus spoke, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God in the righteousness of Christ, leaving the old man crucified in the cross of Christ.

## **Matthew 16:24**

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

When we have gone through the fire, and imagine that all is cinders and lost, when we have finally come out and found that what remains now rest and is built on the foundation of Christ, there we may begin to see the burning bush, there we

may see the fourth man in appearance like the Son of god even in the midst of the furnace where the ropes that once bound and hindered are burned away. In Christ when we finally come to the end of ourselves, and put all on the foundation of Him, we are no longer debtors to the flesh. God uses iron to sharpen iron, fire to refine gold, and storms to test foundations.

### **Hebrews 12:7-11**

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

## **Why so Hot and Dry?**

The wilderness is a dry place, devoid of all of the normal daily routines and people and things that usually keep us pre-occupied and assured of our place and identity.

When we are forced to be still and listen, it is then that we realize the one true thing that we need, as did Martha in the midst of her busy service for the Lord.

The wilderness is a place where we can truly focus on our real need, and follow that hunger and thirst for God's righteousness which is only quenched by the water of life that Jesus gives.

Some places that God intends as our destination we cannot know beforehand lest we fail, in our anticipation, to learn the lessons we need to learn from God in order to get there. Usually pride, and our dependence on our own strength, is what will keep us from arriving at the place God has for us because in order to get to a God ordained destination, the journey must be provisioned, and in reliance on the leading and strength of God.

A wilderness is a place that offers not a place of rest or comfort, no place to permanently pitch our tent.

### **Hebrews 11:13-16**

*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*

Fiery trials are not always a form of judgment. A trial can bring us to a wilderness experience, or a longing for that which can only come from union and fellowship with God.

The wilderness is where pride, a self centered reliance and confidence in the capabilities of natural man are burned off.

It is where all the distractions, the cares and concerns, the busyness of life, the things that can choke the seed of the Gospel, are quieted, and where the soul then learns to wait patiently for God alone to be the source of what is needed. It is where one can most clearly hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

### **1 Kings 19:11-12**

*Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

The Wilderness is where we will come to the end of our confidence and dependence on anything but God alone.

Some things, which in themselves seem good, yet if they have come to take the place that God Himself should have in our lives, may need to be burned off, so that our confidence and reliance and our strength come completely from our dependence on that which God alone can supply through our faith in Him.

Many of us approach our relationship with God with the idea of being built up by the very things we will need to let go of if we are to truly rest and abide in Him.

In the modern popular religious movements of our day, much still seeking to freely use the name of Jesus in promoting itself, there is too much "fools gold", too much wood, hay and stubble being used supposedly on behalf of God's kingdom, but which in reality is really on behalf of the kingdom of men, on their own desires, agendas and goals.

Fiery trials are not always a matter of judgment. For as Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, for those who indeed bear fruit, the Father prunes, He takes off that which is not needed. Fire burns and purifies gold by removing all the dross.

### **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**

*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; 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. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

### **Revelation 3:17-18**

*Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

### **John 15:1-2**

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

Moses had come to the end of his believe in his own greatness. He felt consumed, that there was nothing left of his life. It is then through the revelation of

the burning bush, that Moses is introduced to the great I AM so that he could now be ready, a purified vessel, to follow the path and leading of God's agenda, and God's purpose, strength and provision.

## **The Consuming Fire**

Many people fail to understand the true distinction between a religious orientation towards God, and that relationship that God is offering in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For religion is typically focused on the external appearance and actions of a man who performs them in order to appease God, earn His favor and blessing, and to avoid or forestall His wrath or disfavor now and at the final judgment.

The dynamic of the Gospel operates to change lives when men receive first the gift of forgiveness and love of God in Christ, and when in true faith that becomes the reality of who they are, and they are no longer striving to complete themselves by themselves, and they are truly by faith at rest and standing firm by faith on the foundation of Christ and His finished work, there results the fruits in the individual of love towards God, and sharing the love and forgiveness they have received from God with their fellow man. God and His gift of salvation in Christ are not the end point earned by a life of religious works, but rather the beginning and foundation on which a new life is built.

This is why Jesus could say to Martha that as busy as she was with good deeds, it was Mary who had chosen the best part. Mary was not working, but instead was seated at the feet of Jesus who was apparently engaged in a teaching session. She was hearing and receiving the word of salvation and faith in Christ, who was the resurrection and the life, the water of life that would forever quench the thirst of those who hungered and thirsted not for their own righteousness, but the righteousness of God. Eventually, Mary would be able to out-perform her sister, for she would not reach a burn out point that those in a religious mindset reach, that point of exhaustion where no matter how many good works are done, there is no peace with God. Mary would be able to serve motivated by her faith working through love.

It is only through faith in Christ that the new life of the Gospel can be embraced by the individual, and in turn, that individual is changed not by a new prescription for outward behavior, but by the laws of God being written on the fleshy tables of the heart.

Those who are motivated by love and compassion will therefore in the long run produce far more lasting fruit in their lives than those who would show acts of love as a means of trying to earn love.

Jesus told the parable of the one man who was forgiven a great amount of debt but who showed no mercy to one who owed him a far lesser amount. The dynamic at work was one in which it is the response to God's grace that if truly received and understood, will result in a change of how the individual relates to God, their self, and their neighbors. We love, the Bible teaches, because God first loved us. Those who miss the significance of both their need for the gift, and the true incredible nature of the gift of eternal life in Christ will fail to produce the fruit of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. A relationship of works based religion toward God will result in a lack of true compassion toward others.

### **Luke 7:36-50**

*Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."*

*And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."*

*So he said, "Teacher, say it."*

*"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"*

*Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."  
And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."*

*Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*

*And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"*

*Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."*

Indeed, Jesus taught his disciples when they asked Him how to pray that a key factor in our relationship with God was showing the same forgiveness to our fellow human beings (Matthew 6:12).

If we have come to the point where the fire is consuming us, where our activities, our religious deeds, the works we are attempting to do for God, then the life that is in us is not of God. For as Moses stood before the burning bush, he saw that the bush was not consumed, the bush had something in it that was inexhaustible, the eternal life of God.

#### **John 4:9-14**

*Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*

*Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*

*The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"*

*Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."*

While many seek to be engaged in the business of popular religion seeking fame and fortune and the praise of men, there are yet others who sacrifice on behalf of the Gospel out of a passion for redeeming souls for the true kingdom of Heaven, who are motivated not to earn, but simple to respond to the treasure they have been given of far more value than anything this world can ever offer.

There is no pressing in for union and fellowship with God when ones relationship is based upon quality and quantity of religious deeds. It is only God's very life in the believer that allows the believer to endure the presence of God, for He is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

As Jesus is the vine, His Father is the vine dresser. And He taught us that all of those who bear fruit in Him, are not pampered and showered with gifts so they become content, rich and in need of nothing. But instead they are further pruned, and the fire refines the gold and burns off the dross, so that only that which is truly built on the foundation of Christ remains unshaken. For the fire will be part of the experience of all of the descendants of the first fallen Adam who choose to heed God's call to redemption through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Revelation 3:17-19**

*Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

**John 15:1-2**

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

**James 1:2-4**

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

**1 Corinthians 3:12-14**

*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; 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. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.*

**1 Peter 1:6-8**

*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, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*

## **2 Peter 3:10-13**

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

As all things are destined to be burned Peter asks, what sort of men ought we to be? What is the true value we place on things, those things that are seen which are temporal and fading away, or those things which are unseen and eternal?

And so the children of Israel, terrified by the fire of God on the mountain, said to Moses, "you speak to God for us, and whatever He says, we will do!" For we do not wish to come near the mountain that is burning lest we perish.

There is only one way to endure the fire and continue into eternity. That is with the very life of God within us, for fallen man to be in union with God through a new living way, Jesus Christ. Christ came and went to the place of spiritual and physical death that man now inhabits to make a new and living way for man to be reunited with his creator. Man could not reach God, by nature man was a child of wrath, at enmity with God. God came to where man was, became as a man, and made a new and living way for fallen man to turn in his heart and be born again in Christ, to leave the darkness, to cease to hide behind the fig leaves of the works of his hands, to be clothed with the very life of God, in the righteous robes of His Son.

Paul had learned the secret of contentment, and he had learned the source for true hidden strength that enabled him to do all things through Christ.

How often have we seen people in the name of God, but operating in a system of works based religion, doing things in contradiction to the character, nature and holiness of God?

The Law of God applied without the grace of God will produce wrath, resentment, and animosity in those seeking to be better than those around them as they measure themselves by themselves. This is not the fruit of the Gospel that God is seeking from those redeemed and made members of His household as joint heirs of Christ.

The trials and tribulations of the life of Moses brought him to a place where he was spent, the fiery trials had consumed all of the natural resources on which he might have depended as he sought to fulfill his calling.

Before Moses was a bush, completely engulfed in flames, that was yet never to be consumed. It had a life and vitality in it that could not be exhausted.

It was in this strength that Moses would go on, as a humble man, yet operating in great power and authority, as he learned to do the will of God by relying on the power of God. Paul wrote that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. Paul had done many great works on behalf of the Gospel, yet Paul said, "it was not me, but Christ in me". He would only boast of those things that God had accomplished through him. He had come to the place where he learned that in consciousness of his weakness, was the true power of God perfected.

## **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

*And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

## **2 Chronicles 16:9a**

*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the fiery furnace choosing not to bow down and be assimilated by the Babylonian kingdom, but choosing instead to identify themselves with a city whose builder and foundation was God Himself, one in appearance like the Son of God walked with them. All those things that had bound them, the ropes and constraints that society had put on them, were burned away in the fire.

The true church, the body of Christ Himself, is not a place to seek to avoid the fire, though it would seem that much of the popular teachings of the day promise the methods to achieve one's own personal peace and contentment, for it is in the fire that the gold is refined, and it is in the fire that the true value that things that are eternal are weighed against the things that are temporal. Where we see our nakedness apart from being clothed with the righteous robes of Jesus Christ.

Growth in the Lord is a matter of increasing dependence on His strength and who He is for who and what we are. And so it is, that while many seek to continue to build on the old foundation using the means of religion, yet those who truly have

a heart for God and His righteousness, and who recognize that they are themselves apart from God poor in spirit, and this knowledge many times comes in the fiery trials of life, it is those that have come to the end of themselves that will seek and find the rest that God offers and supplies in Christ.

## **Burning Bushes**

As God was the burning bush to Moses, so Moses was as a burning bush to Israel. The Apostle Peter was a burning bush to the Jews. The Apostle Paul was a burning bush to the gentiles. Jesus was a burning bush, a light unto the world on the stage that God had set in Jerusalem so that there would be no mistake about the role His Son was to play.

So in our current existence God will bring individuals who are as Paul describes not the wise and successful according to the world systems standards, but by the unseen criteria, that measurement which is not man measuring himself by himself, but the full stature of those who have come to a mature faith and rest from their own works, in Christ Jesus.

They are the burning bushes of our time, not sustained by what the world deems successful or precious. They are rich in faith in God and are demonstrating and reflecting the truth of the Gospel not in their worldly possessions or by becoming popular by the worlds standards of success, but instead they show in their character and lives the fruit of faith in Jesus the Messiah, in whom are hid from natural eyes all the true treasures of Heaven.

### **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*

## **The End is the Beginning**

After forty years in the wilderness, Moses was going back to Egypt, back to the world system of men, a place where politics, prestige and privilege are evaluated as strength. Moses was now ready to do in God's power what Moses had failed to do in his own strength.

Moses apparently still had his credentials. When he sought to see Pharaoh, the doors would open. But Moses no longer identified who and what he was as member of Pharaoh's household. He was now the humble servant of the God who would be what he would be. Moses was not going back to Egypt with an attitude and all full of himself, God was not in his pocket, instead, now Moses was a servant of the most high God. Moses was no longer the message, he was now the messenger. When he followed God's direction, he then walked in the authority and power of God to accomplish God's agenda.

In the book of Acts, chapter 2, the disciples of Jesus were waiting for the power from on high to do the will of God. They were not there praying and fasting trying to become religious enough to earn it, or compel God to move on behalf of their works.

The kingdom of self and ego came to an end for the disciples when they saw Jesus wash their feet, then be crucified, then three days later raised from the dead, and finally they saw Jesus physically drawn up into the clouds. They were now separated from the world in their identification with Christ. They were now living as citizens of the kingdom of God while still physically in the kingdom of men, in the world, but no longer of it. They had left homes, businesses, worldly ambitions and opportunities for greatness and success in the eyes of men for the truth, and in Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life, they were now free to serve God in newness of spirit.

Until we come to the end and let go of ourselves, we will not hold on to God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is through many tribulations we enter the kingdom of God, for he chastens us as children that we would share in

His holiness. If we do not abide in Him, we can do nothing. Sometimes the boat that served us so well in the past and that we had come to trust and rely on is overwhelmed by a storm, and we must walk in faith taking our eyes off of our circumstances, and keeping them fixed on Jesus, the author, perfecter and finisher of our faith, knowing that our life is hid in the unseen in Him, and that there is nothing, not death nor life can separate us from His love.

To be a true Christian is to learn the secret of being content in all circumstances and do all things, even when we have come to the end of ourselves, to stand on the foundation of Christ, overcoming the world by the word of our testimony, for we know to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

**2 Cor. 4:16-18**

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

**2 Cor. 5:1-8**

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

## Success in the Spirit

When the current model for successful church growth is to apply the teachings of social engineers and popular motivational principles to build up individuals for leadership, it might be well to remember that Jesus said whoever would be greatest among you, let him be your servant. We have many powerful and charismatic personalities with profitable ministries that draw many after themselves, yet do we have many that truly operate in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming the simple message of the gospel with signs following? They are drawing people to themselves promising them the things the gentiles seek, not leading them to the true eternal riches that satisfy, but which only come when the old nature has been left on the cross, and by faith, we are clothed with Christ.

### **I Cor. 4:7-13**

*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us — and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!*

### **Rev 3:17-19**

*Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*

**James 1:2-8**

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

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