

Message Four

The Corporate Thornbush

Scripture Reading: Deut. 33:1, 16; Exo. 3:2-6a;
1 Tim. 3:15-16; Luke 12:49-50; Acts 2:2-4

- I. In the eyes of God, Moses was a thornbush burning with the Triune God (cf. Deut. 33:1, 16); as individuals, we all are today's Moses, but we are also a part of the church as the corporate thornbush (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15-16):**
- A. When God called Moses, he saw the great sight of a burning thornbush; once we were thorns under the curse in Genesis 3, but in Exodus 3 we are a redeemed thornbush; this burning thornbush is both the children of Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament.
 - B. In the church today there are still "thorns"; the church is not yet precious stone; nevertheless, we praise the Lord that we are undergoing the process of transformation—Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18.
 - C. In Deuteronomy 33:16 Moses spoke of God as the One who dwelt in the thornbush; this word was uttered when Moses was one hundred twenty years of age, forty years after he had seen the vision of the burning thornbush:
 - 1. Moses never forgot that vision, even after the tabernacle had been built and God had come to dwell in it.
 - 2. How marvelous that a thornbush can be God's dwelling place on earth today!
- II. God's ultimate goal is to obtain a dwelling place; this means that God's eternal purpose is to build up His habitation:**
- A. In Genesis we have the revelation of the house of God at Bethel (28:10-22), but we do not have the actual building of the house of God.
 - B. At the beginning of Exodus God dwelt in the thornbush, but at the end of the book He dwelt in the tabernacle—3:2-6a; 40:34-38.
 - C. The tabernacle with the Ark thus became the focal point of the history of the children of Israel; eventually, the tabernacle was enlarged into the temple.
 - D. The Lord Jesus came both as God's tabernacle (John 1:14) and as God's temple (2:19); the church today is also the temple of

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God (1 Cor. 3:16); ultimately, this temple will consummate in the New Jerusalem, which will be both God's tabernacle and God's temple in eternity (Rev. 21:3, 22).

- E. In the beginning God's dwelling place was a redeemed thornbush, but gradually this thornbush is being sanctified, transformed, conformed, and even glorified; the tabernacle is an illustration of transformation:
1. In the tabernacle there was acacia wood overlaid with gold and also linen embroidered with gold thread; both the acacia wood and the linen signify humanity, and the gold signifies divinity—Exo. 25:10-11; 26:15, 29; 36:34; 37:1-2; 28:6; 39:3.
 2. In Exodus 3 God's dwelling was a thornbush, but in Exodus 40 His dwelling was the tabernacle made of humanity overlaid by and interwoven with divinity; such an overlaid and embroidered humanity is a transformed humanity.
- F. Both the thornbush and the tabernacle are symbols; God's actual dwelling place was neither the physical thornbush nor the tabernacle; it was His people:
1. After the children of Israel had been dealt with by God, they became acacia wood overlaid with gold and also linen embroidered with gold thread; the church today is the fulfillment of this type.
 2. At present, the church may be a redeemed thornbush; however, the day is coming when we shall be gold, pearl, and precious stone—Rev. 21:18-21.
 3. Praise the Lord for this marvelous vision of God's dwelling place! This vision covers God's habitation from the initial stage, the stage of the thornbush, to the consummate stage, the stage of the New Jerusalem.
- G. When Moses was called by God, he saw the holy fire burning within the thornbush; when Paul was called, he saw the same vision in principle—cf. Acts 9:4-5:
1. Paul saw the Triune God burning within His redeemed ones; through this divine burning, the holy fire was one with the thornbush, and the thornbush was one with the fire, which is the Triune God Himself.
 2. The Lord Jesus once said that He came to cast fire on the

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earth (Luke 12:49-50); on the day of Pentecost the Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:2-4).

3. Today the Lord is still casting fire on the earth; this holy fire, this divine burning, has captured us, and now we are part of the thornbush that is burning with the Triune God.
4. The Triune God is burning within and upon the church, which He has chosen and redeemed; thus, the church is the Triune God burning within a redeemed humanity; this is the divine economy.
5. This economy was revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:3-5, 9), and it is the focus of the divine revelation; Moses saw this in symbol, but Paul saw it in reality.
6. How we praise the Lord that His economy has been unveiled to us! Every local church is a thornbush burning with the Triune God.
7. In Ephesians 1 and 3 we have the divine economy, the dispensing of the Triune God into His redeemed people so that they may become His expression; this dispensing brings into being the church as the burning thornbush today.

III. Because of God's redemption, the excluding flame of Genesis 3 has become the visiting and indwelling flame of Exodus 3—Gen. 3:24; Exo. 3:2-3; Gal. 3:13-14; Rom. 12:11; 2 Tim. 1:6-7:

- A. The thorns in Genesis 3 indicate that fallen man is under a curse—vv. 17-18.
- B. Sin brought in the curse, and the curse brought in the excluding flame of fire—v. 24.
- C. In Exodus 3 the cursed thorn becomes the vessel of God, and the flame of fire becomes one with the thornbush—vv. 2-4:
 1. Through redemption, signified by the lamb slain and offered to God for fallen man (Gen. 4:4), the curse has been taken away, and the fire has become one with the thorn.
 2. Galatians 3:13 and 14 reveal that the redeeming Christ has taken away the curse and that the Spirit as the fire has been given to us—cf. Luke 12:49-50; Acts 2:3-4.
- D. The very God Himself, the Holy One whose holiness excludes sinners from His presence, can come to visit us, stay with us, and even dwell in us through the redemption of Christ.

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IV. The church is a corporate thornbush burning with the God of resurrection:

- A. The children of Israel were a corporate thornbush; as such a thornbush, they were redeemed (Exo. 13:14-16), sanctified (v. 2), transformed, and built up; this is a type of the church as a corporate thornbush.
- B. Do not say that the church is poor, low, or dead; the more you say this, the more you put yourself under a curse, but if you praise the Lord for the church life and speak well concerning it, you will put yourself under God's blessing:
 - 1. "He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, / Nor has He seen trouble in Israel"—Num. 23:21.
 - 2. "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, / Your tabernacles, O Israel!"—24:5.
 - 3. "Blessed is everyone who blesses you, / And cursed is everyone who curses you"—v. 9b.
- C. From the time that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem until now, every nation, people, race, or individual who has cursed the Jewish people has received a curse, and whoever has blessed the Jewish people has received a blessing (Gen. 12:3); it is the same with our attitude toward the church—if we curse the church, we will be cursed, but if we bless the church, we will be blessed.
- D. In spite of all the division, sin, confusion, abuse of gifts, and heretical teaching in the church in Corinth, the apostle still called it the church of God because the divine and spiritual essence which makes the assembled believers the church of God was actually there—1 Cor. 1:2.
- E. Being a corporate thornbush as God's dwelling place today is a matter altogether in resurrection:
 - 1. The church is "Christly," "resurrectionly," and heavenly—cf. Gen. 2:22; Eph. 1:19-23; 2:6.
 - 2. Resurrection is the life pulse and lifeline of the divine economy—1 Cor. 15:12.
 - 3. Our labor for the Lord in His resurrection life with His resurrection power will never be in vain, but will result in the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose through the preaching of Christ to sinners, the ministering of life to the saints,

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and the building up of the church with the experiences of the processed Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones—
v. 58; 3:12.

- F. Individually we are a thornbush, and together we are a corporate thornbush burning with the God of resurrection; this is a picture of the church life today.