

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

D. H. Dolman, M. A., D. D.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FIRE WHICH MUST EVER BE BURNING

“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. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out” (Leviticus 6:12, 13).

As a boy I was brought up in a little country-town in Holland. It was about twenty miles from the nearest railway-station. When I was about twelve a most important event happened in our town. A councilor more energetic than others suggested the town should be connected with the nearest railway-station by a little local train. There was much opposition. The farmers were afraid their horses would shy when such a clamping monster met them on the road. At last, after many deliberations, to the great joy of us boys, he carried his proposal.

We boys could hardly await the time when the rails would be laid and the first train would leave the little station. I still remember how the important persons of the town took their seats in the car drawn by a little steam engine. The first few months it was most interesting to travel by it. There was something of adventure in the journey. You could never be quite sure when you would arrive at your destination.

One morning it was stopping on the market-place at 11:30, just when the boys were coming out of school. The young machinist could not make it budge. Of course, we boys were interested and ready to proffer suggestions. One, more daring than the rest, suggested, “Perhaps there is no water in the boiler.”

The machinist, exasperated, threw his wooden shoe at him and said, “Water enough, but it does not boil.”

The statement has clung to me throughout my ministry. Water enough; we have plenty of organizations in our churches. Ministers able to organize are eagerly sought. We are over-organized.

The difficulty is the fire does not burn, the fire of the Holy Ghost.

We once crossed by the Canadian and Pacific to Montreal. In the distance we saw some icebergs — it is a beautiful sight. The captain, however, did not seem to like them. He made a large detour.

I have been in churches where I felt inclined to put on an overcoat; the atmosphere was so frigid. I have also at times met Christians who reminded me of icebergs. When the risen Lord joined the two disciples on the way to Emmaus and opened to them the Scriptures, their hearts began to burn. **“Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way?”** (Luke 24:32).

The Lord does not like lukewarm hearts. What we need in our churches and on the mission field is Christians with a burning heart.

Sister Eve of Friedenshort had a motto on the wall of her room:

“Blessed are the burning ones,
For they will conquer the world
For Jesus Christ.”

The burnt-offering has been slain, its blood is sprinkled on the altar, its fat burnt on the altar:

- A type of the perfect sinlessness of our Lord even when He was bearing the load of our sins on the cross,
- A type of His perfect obedience and harmony with the will of His heavenly Father throughout His life.

He was the only man who could say: **“I do always those things that please him”** (John 8:29). He did so during His agony in those dark hours on the cross. The fat offered on the altar — in His life as in His death — Christ was **“an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.”**

We now leave the altar and court. A solemn procession carries forth the offering **“without the camp into a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire”** (Leviticus 4:12).

Let us watch that burning in silence. I do not wish to add any words of my own.

“They took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified him” (John 19:16-18).

“The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:11-13).

Without the camp — sanctification and separation go together.

“Be ye not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed.”

- Not *con*, but *trans*.
- In the world, but not of the world.
- The ship in the water, but not the water in the ship.

The fire shall not go out.

That fire was not lit by human hands. It could not.

“The fire came 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” (Leviticus 9:24).

The word **“Evangelist”** is an honoured word; it is Scriptural. A real revival is not man-made; the fire must come from heaven.

The Baptist said: **“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: HE shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”**

The fullness of the Holy Spirit, a baptism with fire — that is what you and I need. Without it, it is impossible to do efficient service.

Andrew Murray wrote in 1895: “It is the will of God that every child of God should be filled with the Holy Spirit. Without this fullness no child of God can either live or work according to Father's ideals.”

Let us stand and watch the fire as it burns to ashes the burnt-offering. We shall find that the fire cleanses, fire transforms, fire spreads.

1. Fire cleanses.

God's summons to Israel when they returned from the Babylonian captivity was: **“Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord”** (Isaiah 52:11).

His servants should have clean hands. David prayed: **“Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me”** (Psalm. 51:10).

Fire will reveal the nature of our life's work. The great day, when God's children shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, when He comes and brings His rewards with Him, shall declare the nature of our life's work, what sort it is, **“whether it be gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, stubble.”**

Many a house that looks so grand to us will turn out after all to be hay and stubble. Only that which is done from love to the Master, to His Honor, not ours, will have abiding value (I Corinthians 3:12-15). Brother minister, let us watch the fire burning the offering! Let it warn you and me.

2. Fire transfigures.

“He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi . . . then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord” (Malachi 3:3, 4).

Do not shun the refining fire. Are you in the refining fire just now? Brother, do not fear it, rather thank God for it. It shows at least that you are silver and that God thinks you are capable of rendering better service for Him after you have passed through the fire. That is the reason why He takes so much pains with you.

Your heavenly Father, who loves you with an everlasting love, is Himself the refiner.

- He sits and watches the fire.
- He takes care that the fire is not too hot.
- He will not leave you too long in the fire.

Silversmiths speak of the silver look. As soon as the scum, the murmuring, the self-seeking has gone; as soon as His face is reflected in the silver, He Himself will take you out of the fire, a vessel meet for the Master's use.

When we cease looking at ourselves, when we are willing to raise the veil covering our face, when with open face we behold His glory, then we shall reflect it and be changed from character to character by the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 3:18). Then too will others, even our antagonists, take notice that we have been in the school of Jesus. Yes, the fire transfigures.

“If any man [whatever his past, by whatever sins he is enthralled, if he be the greatest sinner in the town] be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Corinthians 5:17).

3. Fire spreads.

It is the nature of fire. Do you not long for the fire to spread? Do you not wish for a revival, sinners to be saved, saints built up in the faith before the Lord comes?

As we watch the fire consuming the offering, let me teach you a prayer: “Lord, give us a revival and begin with me.”

Have you ever asked yourselves what was the cause that Christianity spread so quickly in so short a time, that in less than thirty years after Christ's death the good news was spread all over the then known world?

Study the Acts of the Apostles or if you like the Acts of the Holy Ghost. Again and again we read: **“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”**

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus. He does not speak of Himself; He speaks of Jesus. He keeps reminding us of Jesus and His words. The heart becomes so full of Jesus that even when threatened to keep silent, the apostles said: **“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”** (Acts. 4:20).

Fire spreads.

“Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

Brother minister, would you not long for the Holy Spirit to give this testimony to your town? Think of it, multitudes and not only women, but men also. The good news itself, but also the messengers who brought it, must have exercised a great attractive power.

Yes, you say, but that was in the early church.

Quite right, but is not the same Holy Spirit able and willing to endue with the same power men and women willing to yield themselves entirely to His control?

Fire spreads.

The early church knew what persecution was. It cost something to follow Christ out of the camp, to hear His reproach. Saul made havoc of the church, throwing men and women into prison. They were forced to leave Jerusalem, their birthplace. I mean the place of their new birth.

You say, “What a pity!”

Oh, no. **“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel”** (Acts 8:3, 4).

You say, “Yes, but they were apostles.”

You are wrong there. They were simple every-day folk. The apostles remained in Jerusalem. The reason: every member of the church was a missionary; they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. They had a burning heart. They were fire-flames, and fire spreads.

Dear friends, I am loath to leave the brazen altar and to pass on to the other vessels of the tabernacle.

The Lord has been speaking to me at that altar. I hope He has to you. Before passing on, let me give you some simple rules about keeping up a good fire.

The fire shall not go out.

I do not know how your fire burns, whether it gives good heat. You know. The apostle warned a young preacher, who was his dearly beloved son and his fellow-servant in Jesus Christ, to **“stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of [Paul's] hands”** (II Timothy 1:6).

The word **“stir up”** is significant, to put new life into the fire. It seemed to burn rather low; the flame had died down. Power was lacking; it needed reviving. Reader, what about your fire? Take up the ashes which the fire has consumed with the burnt-offering on the altar. This is the first rule to get a good fire. Ashes keep down the flame. You will never get a bright fire where there is accumulation of ashes.

Note that these ashes were the result of the burning of the burnt-offering.

You have preached a powerful sermon. God has blessed it. There were decisions made for Christ. You have been speaking at a conference. God's children have had a new vision of Christ and of a victory in daily life, of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. “Non nobis, non nobis.” All the praise and the glory be His. Brother, beware of the ashes. After every service I have to ask my beloved Master to cover with His precious blood whatever there was done or spoken in the flesh and not in the Spirit.

Remove the ashes. I held a series of gospel meetings. The pastor and many of God's children had been praying for showers of blessing. Much prayer, and yet showers did not come, only single drops. One evening in my address, I was led to quote the Lord's words (Matthew 5:23), **“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remembereth that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”**

In the middle of the address one of the elders rose from his place and went into the vestry. I wondered if I had said something which had upset him. The elders there are supposed to be sermon-tasters. My consternation grew considerably after a little time when a second elder left and went into the vestry. After a short time they came back and took their seats again with beaming faces. That evening the clouds broke, and up till the close we had continuous blessing.

Why did those elders leave the church? For a considerable time they had a grudge against each other; avoiding each other, and did not speak to each other. In the vestry they confessed their faults to God and to each other, and with a relieved heart they shook hands. The ashes had been removed and the flames went high.

May I ask you tenderly, have any ashes been accumulating with you? Would you like to be the cause that hindered the Holy Spirit of pouring His blessing on your church?

May the Lord show us the ashes and make us willing to obey our Lord and to make right where we have wronged somebody in word or deed. When the ashes are removed, the fire will burn.

And the priest shall burn wood upon the altar every morning.

This second rule seems also self-evident. How can a fire burn if there is no fuel put on it? The fuel you and I need is the daily reading of God's Word for our own souls. I do not refer here to systematic study of the Bible. Every minister would, I take it, devote part of his morning to this. Neither do I refer here to your family-prayers. I take it you have a family altar and read daily with your children the Word of God. I praise the Lord that in my parents' home no meal was taken without the reading of God's Word. My parents believed this to be according to Scripture. **“Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer”** (I Timothy 4:4, 5).

Wood on your own fire, food for your own soul — with the Bible in the closet.

- When you pray, you speak to Father.
- When you read, Father speaks to you.

The danger with us preachers is — at least with me — that so often when I read of a striking passage in God's Word I am thinking how to use it in the next sermon or Bible-reading. I must first be fed before I can feed others. Oh, how I do want daily food myself.

Wood in the morning.

It is a general rule in most houses, I take it, to lay the fire in the morning. Wood is fine fuel. I have had occasion to observe that in Florida. Will you forgive my adding that paper is not? There are some fine daily papers, some with thirty-two pages and even more, but if you devote your morning hour to studying the daily paper till you have come to the advertisements, instead of going to the reading of God's Word, you will find that your fire will gradually die down.

Wood in the morning.

Give the first part of your day to God and fellowship with Him. Speak to Him, but give Him also an opportunity to speak to you. Take fresh wood each day. The Gibeonites brought stale bread; let your bread be fresh. Even in reading our Bibles we are liable to get in a groove.

I once heard Dr. Griffith Thomas giving excellent advice to his students in Oxford. He said, “Use at least two Bibles, one of which you underline every word that has become valuable to you; but when you go into your closet, take a Bible in which you make no marking or underlining so that the Holy Spirit can open up to you a fresh passage each day.” Excellent advice I found it.

He shall burn thereon the fat of the peace-offering.

Of course, fat will make the fire burn. We have so much to thank God for.

I had a dear friend, now in glory, who, when he met somebody in the early morning, his regular question was:

“Have you something to thank God for?”

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

When at a Bible conference the hymn was suggested:

“Count you many blessings,
Name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done.”

A dear friend of mine now in glory, Dr. White, said if he had to do that somebody would have to make him a present of an adding machine.

May the Lord give you and me a grateful spirit.

“We beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our day; through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end, Amen.”

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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