

BUILD A FIRE & SHAKE IT OFF

By Mark E. Hardgrove, PhD

Text: Acts 28:1-6, NKJV

1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

INTRODUCTION

Have you even been in a situation where something got ahold of you, or got in your spirit, and you just couldn't seem to shake it? Someone said something, or someone did something that got under your skin, and you can't seem to let it go. Someone else got the promotion you know you deserved. Someone criticized you after you gave your very best effort. Maybe it was a conversation you had with your spouse or your child, and you keep replaying those words over and over in your mind, and now you can't sleep because you just can't shake it off. If you've ever experienced this, or if you are experiencing it now, then this sermon is for you, because the devil will try to get ahold of our emotions or our spirit, and hold on so that he can poison our mind and heart with the venom of bitterness, or anger, or jealousy. He'll try to keep us attached to that hurt, that pain, or that disappointment, but the Word of the Lord for someone today is that you need to shake it off, and you need to do it today.

Satan is commonly depicted in the Bible as a snake, and there are basically two kinds of snakes - vipers and constrictors. Vipers kill their victim with poison but constrictors suffocate their prey; a constrictor waits until you are asleep, slides up beside you, slowly wrap its coils around you, and then squeezes until you can't breathe, you can't praise, you can't worship, you can't witness, and you can't cry for help.

The apostle Paul was not someone who was going to passively sit by while the devil squeezed the witness or the worship, the prayer or the praise, out of him. Paul was militant

for Jesus and, yes, it got the attention of the devil, but it wasn't Paul who was trembling, it was the Satan who was shaking. Paul would not stop witnessing, and he had every intention of taking the gospel to the heart of the Empire. As a result of a series of events, Paul was in protective custody on a ship on his way to Rome to tell his story to Caesar.

Obviously, Satan didn't want Paul's witness to get to Rome, so he tried to kill Paul in a shipwreck, but neither Paul nor anyone on the vessel were killed by the storm. The ship and all the cargo were destroyed but not a single life was lost, which brings us to our text. As the ship became caught on the sandbar and was torn apart by the violent waves of the Mediterranean Sea, Paul and the others on the ship made it to the Island of Malta.

Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, was on the ship with Paul and he writes in the first-person plural giving an eye witness account. Luke felt the cold that he describes and like all the others, he welcomed the fire that the natives of island kindled for them. He writes in verse 2, "And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold."

As I read this verse, it occurred to me was that there is nothing sadder than for people who have been delivered from the sinking ship of their lives, who have been plucked out of the sea of sin and washed up in a church, only to end up in a place that is wet, cold, and lifeless with no fire, no power, and no passion in their praise.

To their credit, the inhabitants of Malta built a fire to provide warmth for these refugees of the sea. Church, when the lost are led to the Lord and they come through the doors of the church, we'd better have a fire burning or we will all die of exposure while we sit in the pews. We'd better have the fire of the Holy Spirit burning at these altars. We'd better have the fire of our passion for worship and praise burning in these services. We'd better have the Word of God burning like a fire shut up in our bones. Because it's a sad statement on the church when the lost feel more warmth in the clubs and bars than they do in the church. There's something wrong when you find more fired up people at a football game than you find in the church.

We've got the Good News! We've got the power in the name of Jesus! We've got the fire of the Holy Spirit! When people come through these doors, they ought to feel the warmth of God's love radiating from us. And if they don't, then it's time to stir up the gift of God that in us by the laying on of hands. It's time to fan the embers into a burning flame that shines like bonfire in the desert leading the lost to the last oasis of hope in a dead and dying world. Stir up the fire of praise and worship! Stir up the fire of Word and witness! Stir it up! We can't just sit in cold indifference to the fact that there is no fire. Lift up your praise! Call out to

Jesus! He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire!

SNAKES IN THE STICKS

Not only can a church become cold, but we - as individual believers - can become cold as well. In fact, what is a cold church except a collection of cold members? If we do not tend the fire it will go out. Paul landed on an island where the fire was built by others, but then Paul took personal responsibility for keeping the fire burning. He wasn't going to sit around passively while the fire died. Passively sitting in pews waiting for someone else to get us fired up is a sure way to kill the fire in our own heart. Some folk have no problem running from one fired up church to another, but they have no intention of feeding the fire for themselves, and while they may find fired up churches, they never have a fire themselves. I believe God is looking for people to come in with some fire, come in with some passion and praise, and not always trying find a fire that someone else built.

Someone else started the fire for Paul and the others, but Paul wasn't going to sit around waiting for someone else to feed the fire while the fire died. No sir! Paul got busy. Verse 3 tells us that Paul gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire. He was willing to take the initiative and feed the flame to keep the fire burning.

Maybe you remember a time when you were trying to feed the flame. You were praying more, fasting more, and witnessing more. You wanted to see more of the power of the Holy Spirit, so you decided that you weren't going to sit around and wait for someone else to do all the work. You weren't going to wait until your favorite evangelist came to town. You weren't going to wait for the pastor to go on 40-day fast. Instead, you decided that you were going to stir it up, you were going to feed the fire, and it was during this time that you came under attack.

Verse 3 continues, telling us that as Paul was feeding the fire, "a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand." The devil doesn't like it when we get fired up. He doesn't mind it if we're cold and indifferent. He doesn't care if we are complacent and apathetic, but he trembles at the thought of a church on fire for God. The devil is intimidated by believers who are baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire. We need to know that when we decide we're not going to sit in the cold ash heap any longer, when we decide that we're going to take a little personal initiative for our own fire and do whatever is necessary to get fired up, the snakes are going to come out of the sticks. Devils and demons are going to come out of the woodwork and try to latch onto our life.

Suddenly people that you've had good relationships with are going to be talking about you.

They'll say they're concerned that you're taking this "Jesus thing" too far. People who have ignored you and had nothing to do with you will call and want you to go out to the clubs with them. When we make the decision that we're going to move out of the cold and begin to move in the fire of the Holy Spirit, then we need to be prepared because snakes are going to try to attach themselves to us and try to kill our zeal and quench our fire. But we can't let that stop us, because there is victory ahead.

Instead, we have to stir up the coals and rekindle the fire, even if the devil does attack. Because the alternative is to die in the cold, wet, spirit of apathy and complacency with no passion, no power, and no purpose. And as the fire goes down, the circle of people who can feel the heat grows smaller and smaller, the light grows dimmer, and eventually the church dies as members fall by the wayside, lifeless and stiff.

SPECULATION OF THE SKEPTICS

We need to remember that there are people watching our life. There are people around us who have seen us stirring up the coals and gathering fuel for the fire. Some of them saw us come out of the cold, they've watched us move out of complacency, and they're thinking maybe they'll follow our example, but first they want to see what happens to us. They see us feeding the fire, they see the enemy attack, and they're watching to see what will happen next. Look at verse 4:

So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."

When the snakes come out of the sticks and try to attach themselves to us, when we are under attack, and when we need someone to hold us up in prayer, there will be people who will begin to criticize. Some people are going to say, "See there! You should have left well enough alone. You shouldn't have stirred things up." Others will say, "You must have some problem in your life. You must not be where God wants you, or you don't have enough faith, because if you did you wouldn't be going through this."

But the Bible tells us that if we live godly in Christ Jesus, we will suffer persecution. We are told that in the world we shall have tribulation. We are told that there will be fiery trials, so it shouldn't be a surprise that when we make a move to feed the fire in our life or in our church, there will be an attack. That's why some people would rather let sleeping dogs lie. They try to fly in under the radar of Satan. They try to keep their head down and hope to be overlooked by the devil.

Some people are willing to live their lives in the cold gray mist of mediocrity, but I think we should want to see fire burn again. We should want to move into the bright light of God's love and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. We should desire to be a signal fire to the lost who are wandering the dark midnight of their despair. We should endeavor to be a beacon of hope to the hopeless, a light of love to the lost, a flame of fire to the cold and lonely. And if the enemy attacks, we've got the firepower. The song said, "We've got the power in the name of Jesus. We've got the power, in the name of the Lord. Though Satan rages, we will not be defeated. We've got the power, in the name of the Lord."

SHAKE OFF THE SNAKES

As Paul was trying to build up the fire, a poisonous viper sprang from the sticks and fastened his fangs in Paul's flesh. What did Paul do? Well, he didn't scream like a little child and run from the fire; he didn't stop what he was doing; and he didn't lose faith in God. Verse 5 says, "But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm."

The good news is that when we are moving in the power of the Holy Spirit and we come under attack, we can shake it off. Bishop C. E. Patterson said that when we are baptized in the Holy Ghost and fire, we can shake the snakes off into the fire. The fact is that the devil is going to attack the people of God. The serpent is going to come out of the sticks and try to attach itself to us, try to sink its fangs into our flesh and poison us, so we need to know that we can shake it off. But Bishop Patterson said we can't shake it off into the fire if we haven't been baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He said that if all we do is shake it off, the snake may crawl away for a while, but it will eventually come creeping back again to bite us. He said we have to shake it off into the fire.

That's why some people will get the victory for a while - for a week or a month or a year. They shake off the snake, but they don't have the fire of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the victories are temporary. We don't just want to shake it off; we want to shake it off into the fire. We want to know that we have gotten the victory and that this thing is never going to come back to bite us again. Back in the day we called it being sanctified. It is "victory over sin and purity within. It's the fire they had at Pentecost."

Please hear me today . . . we can't shake it off into the fire, if we don't have any fire. We can't shake it off into the fire, if our wood is wet and our fire has gone out. We might shake it off for a day; we might shake it off on Sunday morning, but if we didn't shake it off into the fire, that serpent of old will be waiting for us on Monday morning.

When I was a boy, I used to see people shaking under the power of the Holy Spirit. I grew

up in the little country Church of God on the dirt road of Elk Lick, West Virginia, and when the Spirit would move on them, they'd start to shake. Someone who was new to our church or new to the Pentecostal experience might have looked at them and asked, "What are they doing?"

I'll tell you what they're doing. They are fire baptized and Holy Ghost filled, and the devil has tried latch onto them all week, but right now all they gonna do is shake it off. They have a fire burning in their heart, the wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing in the house, their worship is fanning the flame, and this fire is about to explode into a devil defeating, soul stirring, blaze of praise up in here! The devil has tried to take them down, but tonight the fire is burning and they are going to shake it off.

It's been a hard week, but they're gonna shake it off. Someone talked about them, but they're gonna shake it off. Someone hurt their feelings, but they're gonna shake it off. They've had to come through some storms to get to church, they've been through some trials and tribulations, and the devil, that serpent of old, has tried to silence their shout and wipe out their witness, but right here, right now, with the fire of the Holy Ghost on them, they're just gonna shake it off.

The devil tried to kill them, but he couldn't do it. Satan tried to wreck them, but they rose up out of the wreckage. Devils tried to drown them, but they come up out of the waves. The circumstances of life tried to cool them off, but they built a fire. The serpent tried to strike them, but they shook it off into the fire.

Sometimes people watching us don't know what we're doing or why we praise the way we do. They see the serpent strike, and they are expecting us to fall. Verse 6 says, "they were expecting that [Paul] would swell up or suddenly fall down dead."

These people saw Paul shake off the snake, but this was a viper and they were watching and waiting for Paul to keel over dead from the poison. That's the way some folk watch us when we get fired up. They give that knowing and condescending smile and whisper to someone, "Don't worry. They'll cool down in a little while. This thing won't last." Unfortunately, it often doesn't last, and I don't think we can live in a constant state of emotional manifestation, but I do believe that we can walk in the fire of the Spirit every day. I do believe that we can live and move and have our being in Him. I do believe that we can be spiritually fired up, even if we aren't running the aisles of the church.

One of the most fired up Christians I ever met was a man whose life was sold out for Jesus. I never saw him dancing in the Spirit or falling out at the altars, but if you sat down with him

for five minutes you could feel the heat. All he could talk about was Jesus. Whenever the name of Jesus was mentioned his eyes lit up and his voice would rise in pitch and speed as he began to talk about how good God had been to him.

Don't confuse an emotional catharsis with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Emotions rise and fall, they come and go. They're stirred up one day, and rained on the next day. Emotions can be manipulated by other people around us, but the fire of the Holy Spirit is an internal dynamo, it is a source of power in our life that glorifies God in our praise, in our service, and in our worship. This is a fire that the world doesn't give . . . and the world can't take away.

You may not be the most emotional person in the church, but you still need to keep the fire burning, and you need to disappoint the people who think it's just a fad that's going to die down, or that you're going to cool off in a few days.

The people were waiting for Paul to die, but he didn't die. Instead, "after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god." They went from one extreme to the other. People are fickle like that. One moment they'll think you are blessed, the next moment they'll swear you're cursed. One day they think you're the cat's meow, but the next day they think you're a dog. And there are people around you who think you are about to go down for the count, but you need to change their minds. You need to shake it off and keep on keeping on.

We don't want anyone thinking we're a god, but we sure do want them to know that we serve the living God, maker of heaven and earth. We want our victories to testify to the goodness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But before we can do that, we're going to have to learn to build some fire and shake it off.

Sometimes criticism is the snake that attaches to people and brings them down, but sometimes it is the accolades and the success that becomes the venom poisoning their soul. Not only do we need to shake off the biting criticisms, but we need to be able to shake off the praise and the accolades that others will sometimes heap upon us. We need to give all the glory to God. Shake it off, stay humble, and give glory to God church, give glory to God!

CONCLUSION

I've watched a boxer get his clock cleaned and stumble back to the corner, saved by the bell. His trainer says, "Shake it off kid! Get back in there and fight." I've watched boxers literally shake their head and shoulders and I've seen them get back in there and win the match.

In football, if a quarterback throws an interception, he is prone to get down on himself and be defeated mentally while there's still a lot of time on the clock. Sometimes you'll see the quarterback sitting alone on the bench with a towel over his head looking dejected, but a good coach will go over to him and say, "Shake it off. The game's not over yet. There's still time to turn this thing around. Get back in there and win this game." And I've seen them do it.

Back in 2017 we saw Tom Brady and the New England Patriots do it to the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl 51. The Patriots set a Super Bowl record by coming back from a 28-3 deficit to beat the Falcons 34-28. It had been a bad first half for the Tom Brady and the Patriots, but Brady just had to shake it off, get back in there, and keep doing what he knew to do. He had to trust the team to work together against all odds, to bring home the trophy. As a Falcon fan, that hurt, but it illustrates the fact that sometimes we just have to shake it off and get back in there, because it isn't over 'till it's over.

Let's face it, there will be times when the enemy gets a lick in on us. Occasionally we'll get our bell rang. Sometimes the viper bites us, but we have to shake it off into the fire and keep going. Sometimes, despite our best efforts the ball will end up in the wrong hands, the words come out wrong, the intention is misunderstood, people get angry with us, and our feelings get hurt. The serpent will spring from the sticks and strike us, but we just have to shake it off and keep on keeping on.

I remember Evangelist Bill Lee's illustration of the mule in pit. An old mule fell into a large pit and couldn't get out. The farmer couldn't get it out either, so he said, "Well this is an old mule, and he didn't have much time left anyhow, so I'll just go ahead and bury him in this hole." But every time the farmer threw in a shovel full of dirt, the mule would just shake it off, and step up a little higher. The more dirt the farmer shoveled, the more the mule just, shook it off and stepped up a little higher, until finally the mule was high enough to walk out of the pit.

Some of you may feel like you're in a hole or a pit and the devil is trying to bury you alive. It may be a relationship, or finances, or health issues. It may be a work problem or an emotional problem, but it feels like you are in a hole and the devil is shoveling dirt in on your head. Well God sent me by to tell someone that you can shake it off, and step up a little higher.

Some of you feel like the serpent has gotten his fangs into you and the poison of anger or bitterness is trying to spread through your spirit. I know this sounds cliché, but you just need to shake it off into the fire and step up a little higher. If you don't have the Holy Spirit

and fire then you need to ask Jesus to baptize you in the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and sat upon each of them and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Some of you want to build a fire in your life, and some of you need to rekindle a fire that has gone out, but we all need the fire so that we can shake it off and step up a little higher.

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