

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Not Business as Usual, No. 1*

Bushes That Burn

April 26, 2020 (video)

Exodus 3:1-12 (NIV)

Today, April 26th, marks our seventh Sunday worshipping like this – in this online format. It's hard to believe that it's been going on two months now since so much of our way of doing things has changed.

I've mentioned before that, early on in this, I told our sons that they really ought to take special note of these days – be aware, and write down your observations – the ways you're thinking and feeling, because these are days you'll tell your children and grandchildren about, should Jesus not return first.

We've heard it said a lot – I've said it a lot – these are strange days – days that only come around once in a lifetime.

These are unique days. Different days. Extraordinary days.

That's what I thought we'd study together in the weeks to come: we'll take a look at some of the unique and different and extraordinary days and times the Bible tells us about; how people of faith approached those days; and how God appeared in them – how He revealed himself through them – and how He was faithful to His own in the midst of them.

That's what I wanted to do. So, with that general theme in mind, I sat down with my Bible and began what I thought would be a great hunt – a Scriptural safari maybe – for those rare, elusive, unique, different and extraordinary days from which I might pull some principles and encouragement to share with you.

But I ran into a problem. When you're hunting and you run into a problem, the problem is usually that you can't find what you're hunting for, right?

That was not my problem.

My problem was, really, the opposite. What I found is that, really, our Bible is basically one big compilation – one enormous list – of unique and different and extraordinary days and times! That's what this book is.

People get this book all wrong, you know? People think this is some dried-up, monotone history book that reports every little detail of hundreds or thousands of years of normal, common, day to day life.

That couldn't be further from the truth.

The fact is, you can hardly turn a page, or at most a chapter, in here without running head-first into another unique and different and extraordinary event or day or season.

This is significant to me, because we hear all this about these days in which we're living being so very special and unique and different. We think that all these upendings of our routines – the turning on the head of how things work and operate, the things that cause this sort of upheaval – are unprecedented.

But really, you know, they're not.

I mean, they may be in the span of a typical human lifetime. Very few of us, here in the U.S. especially, have lived through something like this.

So, in terms of our limited human perspective, sure, this is unique.

But when you look back over history, what you find is that the major upheaval of societies, of cultures, of ways of thinking and doing things, and of both personal and societal perspectives – all those things – are really quite common, regular occurrences. They happen all the time in the longer context of history, and certainly in God's history with His people.

Just start at the beginning, you know? In Genesis alone, you move from the creation to the fall, to the flood, to the scattering of nations at Babel, to Abram, to the famine, to the covenant, to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah – and you see, that's just the first 20 chapters!

And the thing is, other than, maybe, books like Psalms and Proverbs, you see this sort of culture shift – culture change everywhere! Plagues, natural disasters, kingdoms rising, kingdoms falling – it just goes on and on and on. And then Jesus arrives, and the natural order seems to change with the day. Day by day He left people wondering, "What has happened here? Who is this guy?"

So, I look at the Bible, and you see report after report after report of one big, life-changing, culture-upending, world-transforming, perspective-shifting, unique, different and extraordinary event after another.

It's all there in black and white for us to read.

And, as I read it, it tells me a couple of things:

First, it tells me that the Bible isn't really that warm and fuzzy, soft and cuddly, feel-good devotional book that we so often treat it as. The Bible tells it like it is – like it's been – and like it will be until God's mission is accomplished here and Jesus returns as He said He would.

It also reminds me, again, that the Bible is not, as it is often said to be, some irrelevant, dried-out, monotone history lesson.

What the Bible really is, is the record that God has given us of major, major ways our world has changed through the ages, and then – right alongside that – it's the record of how He has stayed the same in the midst of every one of them.

And if you look at the Bible that way, you begin to see that, in addition to its being the record of God's saving work in our world, it also serves as a tremendous source of peace and assurance that, whatever it is we may be facing in our lives – in our culture, in our world – the truth is, it's not really unprecedented. It's not really truly new, and God remains just the same.

Now – please hear this – what I'm saying here is not in any way a defense of the new age, circle of life

philosophy – you know, the stuff that says that history just repeats itself over and over again. Not at all.

This world is absolutely heading in a direction. The Bible, as a whole, and Jesus in particular, declares that clearly. History is not a circle. History is a line moving toward an end – an end that will be marked by Jesus' return one day as King of all kings.

And with every day and every event that passes, that day grows closer. We can't predict it. Jesus couldn't predict it – somehow even He doesn't know precisely when it will happen, but with every one of these, so-called "unique, different, extraordinary, unprecedented" events, you can be sure the time draws nearer and nearer.

Still, these things have happened before. Cultures have been upended, and world orders have been shifted, sometimes because of God's intentional action, sometimes due to the weight of human sin. And at times, in those moments, we may not be able to determine one from another.

And the thing is, we don't really have to.

But what we do have to do in the midst of them is realize that, through them all, God remains the same.

To those who reject Him, He is a fearsome and deadly reality.

To those who follow Him in trust, He is utterly reliable, and He will always be our source of rest and peace.

Wherever we fall on the line of history, that is the overwhelming witness and message of this book, and that's the theme I'd like to develop a bit more over the next weeks, beginning this morning with just a brief look at one of the most recognizable accounts of Scripture – one every child of the church is taught at an early age. [Picture]

Many of us will remember the account by just a simple picture – this one colored by Wyatt Weinberger: Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush.

Here is the account, from Exodus, Chapter 3:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up."

⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹² And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." [NIV]

Now, you may be thinking, "How can you compare this encounter between God and Moses with something like a global pandemic?"

Well, here's the thing: when you consider how many things have changed in our world in the years following this event, you realize Moses' encounter with God here changed the course of human history like very few other things.

You see it was this encounter that re-set Moses' perception of God, and which then set Moses in motion to be the savior of His people that God called him to be.

Of course, Moses gave that whole "savior thing" a try years before this, back in Egypt. As a young, headstrong prince who knew it all, Moses tried to muscle his way into the leadership of his people. And even though his intentions may have been good, his methods were not God's.

So, Moses winds up being chased out of Egypt and into a life of obscurity – shepherding, of all things! Moses is probably one of the greatest examples of downward mobility ever recorded.

But God used all that to bring Moses to this point – this place where he would not go off half-cocked, not try to force his way, not depend on his position or money or talent or opinion or anything else about Moses, you see?

In many ways, God allowed everything of significance to be stripped from his life – a 40-year process, so God could then re-shape Moses into someone who would trust Him implicitly, and who would lead a people to trust Him. This people would, themselves, change the course of history and ultimately bring about a Savior by whom God would extend His grace to cover not just Israel, but all of the world who would believe and follow.

But it all started here, you see?

In the midst of all of Moses' questions: "Why am I here in this field? What has happened to my life? How did things come to this? What is my purpose? What about my people – the nation of which I'm really a part? What can be done?"

And, "Where is God? Doesn't He care? Doesn't He see? Why is all that is happening in the world happening? Is there some greater purpose at work?"

In the midst of all of that, this miraculous manifestation – a bush that burns, but that does not burn up – catches Moses' eye, and the interview that follows changes the course of history for Moses, for Israel, for Egypt and for all the world, including you and me.

Because bushes that burn, but don't burn *up*, that's not business as usual, you see?

But very typically, that's what it takes for God to grab our attention so He might convince us of who He really is, and then, if we'll trust Him, so He can use us to change the world.

Although its true origin is disputed, the phrase, "you should never let a crisis go to waste," is attributed to Rahm

Emmanuel, who spoke it first back in 2008, and who returned to it just recently with regard to the present pandemic.

And although we may or may not agree with just how he would apply that, the point of the phrase is not only true, it is divine: God never wants a crisis to go to waste.

Of course, in His heart, God never wanted a crisis to begin with. He created a crisis-less Garden.

But in our world, He will always use crises to shape people, so that people shaped by those crises might shape the future—a future that moves the world to look as God wants it to look.

It's funny that God uses crises to create holiness, but He does!

So, you see, even now—today—God fully intends to use this crisis—this unique, different, extraordinary time—in the same ways He's used all the unique, different, extraordinary times of days past: to call out a whole new family of Moses.

On a world-wide scale you see, God is speaking out of this burning bush. He's using it just as He has used the burning bushes of days past:

- To grab our attention.
- To draw people to Himself.
- To give us time and opportunity to listen to Him.
- To transform the way we understand life.
- To show us His heart for us and for our world.

And, to all who will hear Him and trust Him in faith, He's presenting a mission that will change the future in ways we may well never see in our lifetimes and with our own eyes.

In this pandemic—in this not-business-as-usual, unique, different, extraordinary event—God is doing, once again, the same thing He's done so often in days past.

And so, I wonder. In this burning bush of our day, I wonder if you are hearing God's voice calling to you, as He called to Moses?

If you are—please, whatever you do—whatever He's asking, tell Him, "Yes!"

"Yes, I will.

Yes, I won't.

Yes, I'll stay.

Yes, I'll go.

Yes, I'll trust you, even if I can't see the way. Yes, I'll do as you ask—whatever you ask."

In the end, that is the only way to navigate unique, different, extraordinary, not-business-as-usual times—the very same way all people of faith have navigated them to victory, time and time again in days past.

Lord, help us to not get so caught up in the unique, different and extraordinary, such that we miss your voice in the midst of it. May the burning bush of our day only serve to draw us, and our whole world, closer to You.

Amen.