

The Power of One Coal

Isaiah 6:1-7 (KJV) In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. [2] Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. [3] And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory. [4] And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. [5] Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. [6] Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, **having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:** 7 And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

During the 1800's there was one of the largest migrations of a single people in history along trails going west, namely the Oregon Trail, but also the Santa Fe and California Trails, among others. Historians estimate that 500,000 people used these trails between 1843-1869. This migration was called many things, but was consistently described as "Going West". It was a long, difficult and dangerous journey. The trip was arduous, fraught with risks from infectious diseases, dehydration, injury, malnutrition, and harsh weather, with up to one-tenth dying along the way, usually due to disease.

For all emigrants, the scarcity of potable water and fuel for fires was a common brutal challenge on the trip, which was exacerbated by the wide ranging temperature changes common to the mountain highlands and high plains where a daylight reading in the eighties or nineties can drop precipitously to a frigid seeming nighttime temperature in the low 40s.

Due to many variable factors, the trip across the continent along the Oregon Trail could take 4-6 months. Due to the drastic weather changes it was a race against time. Any alternate route that saved time, could potentially save lives. A common crossing was South Pass in Montana territory, but it followed along the dangerous, contested Bozeman Trail.

Jim Bridger discovered an alternate to the Southpass by accident. One day on their journey, the winds were blowing and it was raining and they could not start a fire with the flint and steel. So they went back to their old camp the day before and found a live coal, a single live coal, and started a fire from that and it saved their life. It was then that he discovered Bridger's Pass, the only pass for wagons to cross the Wyoming Rocky Mountains in that area.

Many thousands of lives were helped and potentially lives saved because of a single live coal!

Because of a single live coal God commissioned, Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets of all time! Before that he felt unqualified and unworthy. He saw starkly his inability to stand before a holy God and become what he needed to become. God had the answer - one coal from the altar touched his lips and changed all that!

Exodus 30:7-8 (KJV) And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. [8] And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

When Aaron went into the Holy Place to service the lamps and dress the candlesticks, he was to burn approximately one-half pound of the holy and proprietary incense upon the altar incense. This was done twice per day, morning and evening. The purpose was two-fold, one, to eliminate or mask the odor of burnt flesh of the animals sacrificed, which incidentally had just taken place on these occasions. Secondly, it was also done as a way to honor God. It being, not merely coincidental, done at the same time as the morning and evening sacrifices upon the brazen altar outside, it provided perfect timing to physically light the small mound of incense; with a coal from off the altar of sacrifice. It is most likely this and a similar purpose that the tongs were made as described repeatedly in Scripture, although it seems that the tongs were most mentioned in reference to the golden candlestick. Either way that we look at it, *both* the altar of incense and the candlesticks had to be purposefully lit; one twice per day and the other in the evening or after the setting back up the tabernacle after traveling to a new destination or encampment.

Exodus 25:37-38 (KJV) And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it. [38] And the tongs thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, *shall be of pure gold.*

The word 'snuffdishes' is actually translated as 'fire-pan' and as a "pan for live coals." Though not much is written concerning this, it is perfectly rational and easily deduced that the tongs that were used to take a coal off of the altar of sacrifice to effect the reignition of the candlestick and were also used on the altar of incense. In other words, it was a single coal that started the light and sweet savor again in the Presence of God in the Holy Place. It makes little sense for the priest to travel back and forth and get more than one coal when he was only a few steps away from the altar of incense when he lit the candlestick.

One coal.

As long as there was wood and sacrifice, all was not lost, they could both be reinstated where they had temporarily either been snuffed out or had burned out.

So it is with our walk with God, when the sweetness and light has gone out of our relationship and interaction with God, besides the important ingredients, all is needed is a single coal from off the altar of sacrifice.

The power of a single coal.

It is in God's interest to *not* extinguish that single coal or that smoking flax. He knows the power of keeping small things burning, though in a subdued and diminished state. God knows that a gentle blowing of the wind of the spirit can often ignite a conflagration of renewed zeal in a ready heart!

Isaiah 42:1-4 (KJV) Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. [2] He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. [3] A bruised reed shall he not break, and **the smoking flax shall he not quench**: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. [4] He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Just as with Jim Bridger's expedition, sometimes in our walk with God, our fire goes out and it would seem the ashes have grown cold. Our soul has all but gone away from God. Sometimes we don't have a lot to bring God, but if we have JUST ONE COAL left...that's all He needs!

Never underestimate the one coal from the previous camp, from the previous experience in God, some landmark of the past. Look beneath the ashes of failure or bitter regret, beneath the ashes of the missed or misunderstood will of God; the things we see clearly now, but didn't then. It may be the thing that carries us through and saves us. When your current endeavor fails and you feel pushed into resignation, don't give up! Return back to yesterday's camp and search for that single coal and reignite your spiritual life! In the process, you may discover a way forward that has been overlooked that will, in the end, benefit many, many lives.

Zechariah 4:9-10 tells us that whatever God starts, He also finishes and it is foolhardy to despise the day of small things.

One coal is all it takes.

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Author's Note: Information on the western migration is taken from an unremembered source; the wording & information is largely not my composition although it has certainly been modified, added to and adapted to this paper. This paper was originally written years ago.