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## **Summer Family Reunion**

### **Part 5 – Pillar of Cloud and Fire**

Alex Himaya

It's so good to be back with you today. I love watching what's happening in this church over the years. In fact, Ted preached at our church a couple of weeks ago. I haven't had a chance to watch it yet, but many members on my team say it's the best message he has ever preached in our church. That's high cotton because he's preached a lot of really good messages in our church.

I love watching how this church is growing, and not just growing... I tell our people all the time, I don't want a church big and fat. I want a church big and strong. We don't want to just grow in number, right? We want to grow in maturity. I love watching how this church is growing. Let me just say to the 10:00 crowd, I promise you that you'll find this to be true. The number of people that come to know Jesus Christ in this church will be very similar to the number of people who give up their seat at 10:00.

You laugh at that because you think I'm joking. I'm actually not joking. If you could pull those stats, you would look at it and literally somebody who was saved could thank somebody who gave up their seat at 10:00 or went to the patio or went to the porch or went to the backyard or whatever all those places are called and made a seat in the room at 10:00 because we live in the south and people come at 10:00. Guests come at 10:00. I don't understand it but that's what happens and so I just want to put that bug in your ear at 10:00 and let you deal with the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

For those of you who are guests and new people here today, I have been preaching here for probably 15 years. You're the place I come to work a message out. So, this is a brand-new message. We're going to give birth to it today and I'll fix it next week. But if you have your bible, I want you to get it out and open it and look at it. We are going to jump all over the scriptures, but I want you to turn to Luke 24.

A few weeks ago, my family went to Italy and a few weeks before that I got a call on my cellphone. It said, "Unidentified caller from Rome, Italy." Typically, I would never answer that call, but because we were going there, I thought it was maybe something about our trip, so I answer it. A voice on the other side of the phone said, "Pastor Alex, this is Father George. I am the assistant to Pope Francis, and I am over all of the Middle Eastern countries that have Catholic churches in them.

I thought I was being punked, but I realized he was telling me the truth over the course of the conversation. He said, "I've heard about your church. I've heard about what you're doing in the middle east. We've heard that you are trying to get aid into the people in Gaza on both sides of the equation, that need aid. What you may not know is that aid is being stolen on the way into the people who need it

and it has been for months and months. We have been trying to use caution and trying to figure out how to get ships of aid into the people that actually need it. They are primarily Christians families who

are caught in the middle of two ideologies and are not on either side but are suffering greatly. He said, "I just want you to know we can be the path for the aid to get in there. I asked him how he would do that, and he said, "I don't know if you know it or not, but the Vatican is actually a country of its own, has a passport of its own, and both sides are recognizing the Vatican passport, so we can ship aid into Amman, Jordan and we can take it across into the place and get it to the people.

I said, "Coincidentally, "I'm going to be in your country in a couple of weeks.

He said, "You come see me. We'll meet, we'll pray and we'll talk about it. The day before, he sent me a map pin on where I was to meet him the next day at the Vatican. I looked it up and it is an alley on the back side of the Vatican. It had a name for the gate that we were going to enter, so I Googled the name of that gate and Wikipedia said that gate hasn't been opened in 1,200 years. So, I'm afraid because I've heard of the illuminati, and I'm not sure how this is going to play out. We went and, sure enough, we got in and we did this amazing tour. One of the things we saw were the crypts, like the graves of all 266 popes. Dating all the way back to Peter. They believe they have the remains of Peter in a crypt there in the Vatican. I thought about that moment because it was so fascinating to me, and puzzling in many, many ways. Good news, they are going to get the aid to the people, so we are going to participate in that, and God is going to open that door.

But as we were walking through, I was thinking about tours because I've been on so many tours all over the world. I've led tours all over the world. In fact, I'm going to lead one to Egypt this December. We will leave the Monday after Thanksgiving and do a Nile cruise and go to the pyramids. We're going to teach Moses at the Pyramids. It's going to be an amazing journey. But on tours that I've led and tours that I've been led on, some of them great, some of them terrible, and everywhere in between. And there are many distinguishing factors, but the top, among all of them, is the tour guide. If you've got a good tour guide, it's a good tour. If you've got a bad tour guide, it's a bad tour.

One time, we hired a guide out for the day in Ammon Jordan. And every place we went, he said, "This place is old." I said, "How old?" He said, "Very." I thought, *you're a lousy tour guide. You're not even the guide in this journey.*

But, I want to start today looking at a journey that Jesus walked and in this passage of scripture, he didn't just walk it, he acted as the tour guide for a couple of unsuspecting guys. Luke 24 is where I want you to turn in your Bible. By the way, this is a passage we normally read on Easter, because the story takes place right after the resurrection of Jesus. You find these two followers of Jesus walking and talking. And Jesus shows up and starts walking with them. They don't recognize him. He's incognito somehow and they don't know it's him. He says, "What are y'all talking about?" They said, "You don't know what we're talking about?" He said, "No, what are you talking about?"

So, they tell him about the arrest and the trial, and the crucifixion, and they say, "And believe it or not, we're hearing he's back from the dead." The scripture says something about what Jesus did with them as he's leading them and guiding them.

Look at Luke 24: 27. Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all of the prophets, explaining from all of the scriptures the things concerning himself. It's fascinating actually. But they keep

walking long enough until they get to this these guys' house or home. They invite Jesus in to have a meal with them. Then look at what Verse 31 says, And suddenly... **31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. In other words, after hearing from Jesus and spending time with Jesus, they were able to recognize Jesus.**

Isn't that a great application for us today. After hearing from Jesus, spending time with Jesus, you are able to recognize Jesus.

If you go back one verse, I want you to see this first line. Then Jesus took them, guided them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all of the scriptures the things concerning himself, that is Jesus Christ. It's unbelievable. Moses, by the way... turn to Exodus if you will and we'll get there in just a second. We know the prophets predicted the death, the burial, and the resurrection. Of Jesus Christ, but Jesus is pointing himself out in the Torah, in Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. He showed them all that those books talked about him and not just how it talked about him, but how he showed up in those books.

A lot of times, as New Testament believers, we're guilty of taking the Bible and cutting it in half, and saying, this is the Old Testament, where everything was screwed up and everything was bad and everything was flipped upside down. And then Jesus shows up and fixes it and we call that the New Testament. And we tend to think that Jesus wasn't present or had anything to do with the Old Testament, so we throw it away or kind of just close our nose and just suffer through all the boring lists and boring parts of the scripture because we know the good part is coming.

Here's what I want you to know today. Jesus is actually all over the Old Testament. John 1 says, he wasn't there in the beginning, he was there before the beginning. He was with God because he was God. And any time you see God show up in the Old Testament, Jesus is there. Any time God is seen or walking around, that's Jesus because Jesus is the bodily manifestation of God.

In Genesis 1, it's the Father who speaks out over creation. It's the Holy Spirit who is hovering over creation, but it's Jesus who bends down and takes up the dust of the ground and begins to form it into a man, into the person Adam. It's Jesus who is getting his hands dirty and doing the work of creation.

I've preached this week for year in this church because this church is halfway between my home in Tulsa and student camp that I do every year. So, tomorrow, we'll take a thousand teenagers from our church to piedmont Missouri to do camp. I will preach all week long to the teenagers of our church. I'm going to walk them through this year, the appearances of Jesus in Genesis. We have a big theological term for those appearances of Jesus. It's this word Christophany. Christ obviously means Christ. Ophany means shows up. So, literally, this is Christ showing up.

And Jesus is pointing out the times that Christ shows up in the writings of Moses and in the prophets and all of the scriptures pointing to him.

So, let's start where Jesus started. Let's start with Moses today. Exodus 3 says one day, Moses was tending the flock of his Father-in-Law, Jethro. Now that I am a father-in-law, I'm going to start preaching this passage. Because I think it's the role of a son in law to help the father-in-law. It's biblical. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the Mountain of God. There, the angel of the Lord... I want you to underline that title. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. That title, *The Angel of the Lord*, more often than not is Jesus. It's a preincarnation of Jesus who is showing up on the scenes. That title is a sign and a marker of a Christophany. So, at the very beginning of Moses' journey in ministry, Jesus is there.

What about at the height of Moses' ministry? Well, that has to be the crossing of the red sea, right? Did Jesus show up there? In Exodus 14, Moses is at the edge of the Red Sea. He's looking across at the sea. Pharaoh and his army are in hot pursuit. All the people are crying out at Moses, "Why did you do this? Why did you bring us here? We're going to be slaughtered. And you know the story. When Moses cried out to God, God said, "Tell the children of Israel to get moving."

Where are they going to move to? There's a sea in front of them and an army behind them? Tell the people to get moving. And if they will move, I will show them my glory. I will show it to Pharaoh, and to everyone. The purpose of the splitting of the Red Sea was not military in nature. It was miraculous in nature to show the world the glory of God Almighty to reveal himself to the world.

Now watch this. And the angel of God... There it is again. Same title. The Angel of God who had been leading the people of Israel moved to the rear of the camp. The Pillar of Cloud was also moved from the front and stood behind them. The cloud settled between the Egyptian and the Israelite camps. As the darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night. The Pillar of Cloud by day and the Pillar of fire by night. And the angel of the Lord is connected to both of those pillars. And intertwined in every instance of this Pillar of Cloud and Pillar of Fire is the angel of the Lord, moving among the Israelites. This is THE Christophany that the Israelites would follow... Not very well at times. but would follow for the next 40 years.

What I want to do today is focus in on this one Christophany, this pillar. The short story is that this pillar would lead the Nation of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. And every time the pillar moved, they moved. Every time the pillar stopped, they stopped. The application is almost so obvious we wouldn't even need to state it, right? That that's what we are supposed to do with Jesus. When he stops, we stop. When he moves, we move. And then Moses built the tabernacle, the place where God said he would meet with his people. This pillar would settle over the tabernacle. In other words, the presence of God, the essence of who he is. The very bodily manifestation of the Lord was there. And when Jesus shows up, everything changes. So, let's back up and find a place when and where this pillar first appears to them. And more importantly, what it does. Because when we hear about this big cloud, it sort of just hovers there all day, and turns into fire at night and just hovers there all night. It's strange. We'd take notice.

I'm from Oklahoma, I know clouds. I know what they're going to do. I know how to predict what they're going to do. In fact, I'm so good at it that I would never show up on a golf course with clouds that looked

the way they did the day that Ted showed up. As a matter of Fact, I was supposed to play golf with him that day. I said “No, look at the clouds.” But the Egyptians are like Ted, they don’t know clouds. They don’t ever see clouds and so they don’t know what is happening with these clouds.

Now, let’s go back one chapter and find out where this thing first shows up. Look at Exodus 13. The Lord went ahead of them, and he guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. And the Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people. So, there’s a pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night. It’s guiding the Nation of Israel. How many of you know that when Jesus is the tour guide, it’s an exciting adventure? It may look like it’s day and it may look like it’s night, but either way, Jesus is leading, and he can lead us through either of those. And in this passage, he leads them in many specific ways. I just want to point out today two of them. Two of the ways that he led them. The first way, we read about a minute ago in Chapter 14. Let me take you back there. The cloud settled between the Egyptian and the Israelite camps. As darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night, but the Egyptians and the Israelites did not approach each other all night long.

Now, the first way that the presence of God, this pillar of cloud and fire, led the people, guided the people was through protection. How many of you know that your tour guide, Jesus Christ, wants to protect you. We want our tour guides to protect us, don’t we? One of the rules I have when I hire tour guides is you will protect my people. Sometimes they’ll say, “What do you mean?” I’ll say, “Look, I don’t want incessant asking for money. I don’t want people trying to figure out when they should tip, how much they should tip, we just put all that in. We bake all that in on the front end, so our people just know they are taking care of people everywhere we go. When a luggage guy gets your luggage, we already got it. It’s already been taken care of. So, I want our people protected.

I got on a boat in Italy and got off of the boat to get in the little rowboat with an Italian sailor I guess he is going to wheel me into the Blue Grotto. The second we got in that little boat, he starts hitting me up. He wanted a 300% tip. And through broken English, he’s telling me that I’m supposed to tip him 300% more than the ticket for the cost to go into the Grotto. When we get back to the boat, I get back in the big boat with my boat guide who is supposed to be my tour guide, and I say, “How much should I tip them?” and he says, “I don’t know.” He didn’t protect me. He didn’t help me, but your tour guide, Jesus Christ wants to protect you.

Now, look at what’s going on in the text. Moses and the Children of Israel have finally left Egypt. Remember God sent all the plagues one after another and all to convince Pharaoh and his people to let them go. So, he relents and he lets them go, but then he regrets it, and he feels like he’s been outsmarted, so he gets the army together to go chase them. Half a million soldiers go after Moses and the Israelites, run into the Red Sea, and now they feel trapped. They see the army coming behind them, they see the Red Sea in front of them and they are terrified, they’re scared, they’re afraid. And what does the Lord do? He goes from before them to behind them to get between them and the enemy to protect them. He gets in between the two camps but look how exodus describes it. Go back there and look what it says. ***And the Israelites and Egyptians did not approach each other all night.*** That Hebrew word for did not approach, we saw it a moment ago in another Christophany back in Exodus 3, where Moses appears before the burning bush. Let me show it to you again. ***Do not come any closer the Lord warned. Do not approach. There’s the word. Take off your sandals for you are standing on holy ground.***

Here's what I want you to hear. The enemy is going to come against you with everything he's got. He's not just coming with chariots and with horses and with armies. He's coming with demonic forces. And he will bring every weapon he has available to him to bear on you. And the only way to protect yourself totally is to hide in God's presence. The enemy will come at you with the full force of hell. And the way that he does that, the way that he kills and steals and destroys believers is through temptation. He can't take your salvation back. He can't steal your salvation. But he can try to take your freedom, and he will on a regular basis.

The only way he does that, if you are a child of God, is to get you and I to fall to temptation. Here's the point. Every temptation has the full force of hell behind it. All of them. Look at what the New Testament says about these temptations. *If you think you're standing strong, be careful not to fall.* Man is that a message for pastors today. Can we just say this celebrity pastor thing ain't working. If you think you're standing strong, be careful or you are going to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you the way out so that you can endure.

Here's the point. The escape from temptation will always take you through holy ground. Always. When you are saved, you're now surrounded by holy ground. Where you put your feet becomes holy ground. In the Old Testament, they were afraid to approach holy ground. Why? Because the sins were only covered up for a minute. In the New Testament, they are removed and taken away forever. So, when you are in Christ, you are in holy ground. There is actually a hedge of protection around you. The enemy cannot take you, he can't steal you back, but you can give into his temptation. That's how he gets you. He gets you to fall into temptation. And when we fall into temptation, we're actually giving holy ground back to the enemy. When you fall into temptation, he will provide the escape or that exit ramp, but you have to take it. He's inviting us to take that offramp and it will take us through. And every time, that offramp will take us through the holiness of God.

And when we talk about holiness in this day and age, I think there's this temptation for us to think that's old school. Holiness is like another generation. That's not hip anymore that somehow we've matured or grown past the need for holiness in our lives. We've gotten beyond talking about holy. And maybe because there's this trap on one side of holiness where we try to live so holy that we end up thinking we did it. That it's all on us and we get proud or arrogant or self-centered and judgmental. And that's true, but listen, all of that trap does not take away anything from the fact that the presence of God is holy ground. And if we are not living holy lives, then we're forfeiting holy ground.

And when you were saved, you were set free from sin. It was a grace, an amazing grace. In other words, you didn't do anything to gain it. You just accepted it as a free gift. But hear me, church, now that you are saved, you get to live that out. And freedom is something you have to fight for to keep. Grace is how we come to God, it's what sets us free from sin, but hear me today, grace is not a hall pass to sin. It's not a pass for us to say, "Well, I've been forgiven. Now I can go live anyway that I want to. If you're giving in to temptation regularly, hear me, you are not free. Grace sets you free. It's holiness that keeps you free and allows you to experience what you've been given. So, God protects us with holy ground. That's what he's guiding us to. In the Old Testament, he guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire at night as a constant reminder of his presence.

By the way, the word for holy is literally the word separate. You're separate. The pillar of cloud and fire, separated the Egyptians from the Israelites. As believers, we are supposed to live separate lives. That's a holy life. God will guide us to new life. He will guide us to full life, but that life will always include holiness and it will always be separate from the world. He protects us but he also provides for us. He will protect us with his presence, but he gives us even more, he provides for us.

The other way he guides us is not just through protection, but also through provision. Go back to Exodus 13. It says the Lord went ahead of them and guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud. He provided light at night with a pillar of fire. He guided them by day with a cloud and at night with fire. In other words... Don't miss the application. He anticipated and provided for all of their needs right when they needed it.

Think about it. What's the biggest danger in the desert during the day? The sun, the heat. It's unrelenting. It's hot, it's dry, there is no shade. Usually there are no clouds in the middle east. So, what does God do? He gives them shade. And don't miss the adjective that describes that. It was abundant shade. It was perpetual shade. It was consistent shade. He provided them what they needed when they needed it. And at night, what's the number one danger in the desert? Believe it or not, it's the cold. There's no humidity to hold the heat in. So, the moment the sun leaves, all the heat leaves. It can drop 50 to 60 degrees in five minutes. And the danger is the cold. He gave them shade when they needed it. He gave them a fire or heat when they needed it. In other words, he provided what they needed when they needed it. And God anticipates your every need.

Look how Jesus put it in Matthew 6:8. ***Your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him.***

That tells me a couple of things. 1 – it tells me that your father loves you. He's a loving Father. He's anticipating what you need. He's looking out for you. But 2 – it tells me we're supposed to do something with that. We're supposed to respond to that. We don't just get it. In fact, we are supposed to ask, seek, and pray. He already knows, so we're not asking to inform him. We're asking so that we can get involved in what he's doing. He's inviting us into what he's doing. God's provision and God's protection are never passive. There is always an invitation to a step of obedience for us.

Remember what he told Moses? "What are you crying out to me, Moses, tell the people to get moving. Tell them to move."

As I've been kicking adult children out of my house the last few years, one of the greatest lessons that I'm learning from scripture is that a loving father doesn't just give all the time. A loving father actually invites his children to be involved.

Would you pray with me this morning? As you bow your heads and close your eyes and open your heart, as we get ready to pray, I just want to point out to you that Jesus didn't say we wouldn't have to work for what we need. He said we wouldn't have to worry about what we need. Whether it's protection... Maybe that's spiritual, maybe that's financial, maybe that's physical or it's provision for you or for your family or for your life. Whatever you need, God has it. And the good news is he's not dangling it over you, saying jump, jump. But he is wanting you to be involved in what he's doing.

We don't work for it. We work because it's good for us. And many of you under the sound of my voice today are facing your very own Red Sea. It's a dead end, a barrier.

This morning, praying backstage with the band and the worship team, one of your very own is facing a Red Sea. And she's not alone in this church.

If that's you today, I just want you to know that if you're following your heavenly Father and he led you there, it's for a reason and he has a way through. He hasn't forgotten you. He hasn't neglected you. That his presence and his protection are all relevant to you today. But if at this moment you are wondering where's God? Is he going to show up? Will he step in? I want to encourage you today this way. Have you asked him? Ask, seek, and pray. Knock. And then ask him this question. What do you want me to do? What is it that you would have me to do?

I have found in my own walk with Christ that the moments where I'm asking the Lord for something and on the back side of that asking, him what's my part and what would he have me to do? That I actually experiencing that word in John – abide, abiding with him. Just staying close with him. What he wants is an intimate relationship with you and me, so can I just challenge you? Ask him for what you need today and then ask him what he would have you do.

If you are here today and you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I'd love to lead you in a prayer helping you do just that. Maybe you couldn't partake in the Lord's Supper a few minutes ago, but that relationship with Jesus is actually something you want, and you want to proclaim it, I want to lead you in a prayer. It doesn't matter what environment you're in, whether here on campus or watching online. If you want to trust Jesus today, would you just pray with me and say...

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, but I turn my back on my sin, and I ask you alone, Jesus, to come into my life to be my Lord, my Savior, my Forgiver. And the best way that I know how, I turn my back on that and trust in you alone Jesus to save me. Thank you for saving me.

In Jesus' name we pray and together we all say Amen and Amen