

Passion 1-26-03

Revelation 3:19; Romans 12:11

One of the most attractive qualities a person can have is passion. Great leaders in every area of life, both villainous and heroic, are people with passion. It draws like a magnet. Hitler is said to have mesmerized people with his speeches because of the passion with which he spoke. Dwight L. Moody had the same affect on people. One affected the world for evil, and the other for good, but they both had the quality of passion that made people pay attention.

What is passion? John Maxwell says, "It is the energy of the soul". One of Webster's definitions is, "A strong liking for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept." The Old Testament idea of passion was often applied to God as the One who was jealous for His people's heart. It is likened to a consuming fire. Song of Songs 8:6 (NIV) *Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.*

It was this zeal of God for His people that destroyed their enemies. But it was the same zeal that sent them into captivity when they were unfaithful. It was this passion that restored Israel after captivity. (Isaiah 42:13) The same passion that God has for His house to be clean and holy. (Psalm 69:9) It is the same passion that would send a Savior who would be clothed in zeal. (Isaiah 9:7; 59:17) Using Webster's definition of a strong liking for or devotion to – Jesus would have to be the most passionate man to ever live. He did not do or say one thing without the approval of His Father. We will never see a more passionate life than that of Jesus. It was a life consumed with pleasing the Father even unto death.

The Great Commandment was for them to love the Lord their God with ALL their heart, soul, mind, and strength. You could say that God asked them to be as passionate about Him as He was passionate toward them. This is not a superficial emotion! It is a state of being totally involved, wrapped up in, enamored with the one on whom it is placed.

We can be passionate about the wrong things. Romans 10:2 (NIV) *For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.* The Jewish leaders, at the time of the early church, were zealous for the letter of the Law. They wanted to be perfect at keeping their definition of the rules, while God was looking for changed hearts. Paul said he was so zealous for the Law the he persecuted the church. (Philippians 3:6)

The good kind of zeal is a zeal that is relational, like God's zeal is for us. That overflows into being zealous to do good works. (Titus 2:14) Just like a when a husband is passionate about his wife, he wants to do things that please her. Men, if you are passionate about your wife, you will not have trouble saying no

Commented [notes1]: 13 The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.

Isaiah 42:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 9 for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.

Psalms 69:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 17 He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

Isaiah 59:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Phil 3:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:14 (NIV)

to the temptations that will come your way. In the same way, if we are passionate about God, about our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the world will have little sway on us. Why? Because you have a love that far surpasses all others!

Have you met someone that you would say had a passion for a hobby? Some men have a passion for football. This is their Great High and Holy Day – Super bowl Sunday. They’ve followed both divisions all through the year. They can quote stats like you’d love to quote the Bible. They are serious about it. They know every quarterback, his back up, his number, and details about his family. They always have their favorite team that they are extra passionate about. And if that team gets in the Super bowl, Lord help us all. He’s got the team jacket and pennant flag, the mug and T-shirt and if he can, he’ll mortgage his house to get seat in that stadium. It is a little annoying being around him, but at the same time, it is exciting. Why? He’s alive! He’s got something to live for even if it is a bunch of grown men banging into each other over a pigskin full of air.

Tony Compolo wrote that, *“We are caught up in a particular stage in our national ethos, in which we are not only materialistic, but worse than that, we’re becoming emotionally dead as a people. We don’t sing, we don’t dance, and we don’t even commit sin with very much enthusiasm.”*

We’re becoming a nation of self-satisfied couch potatoes. We have what we need. We don’t want to be bothered. Just let us go to sleep in our stupor of sufficiency. YAWN! One of my greatest struggles in teaching High School youth is to get them beyond apathy. I hear over and over, “What difference does it make.” They don’t say that to me anymore, because I launch into a passionate explanation of the difference it makes.

Kirkegard wrote, *“Age will die not from sin but from a lack of passion.”* If the enemy of our soul can just lull us to sleep in our satisfied, unconcerned, do nothing deadness, we are of no threat to the realm of darkness. Max Lucado put it this way, *“The poison of the ordinary steals the magic of the moment.”* What has happened to us?

It reminds me of the church of Laodicea. God just wanted them to be passionate one way or the other, anything but lukewarm. Jesus’ personal warning for those without passion, who were self-satisfied, not realizing they were desperately in need, went like this, Rev. 3:19 (NIV) *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Be earnest! In Greek that means to boil! In a negative sense, boil with anger, or with jealousy. In a positive sense, it means a zealous pursuit of good, or to exert yourself for something, in this case repentance. Are you boiling? The command from the lips of Jesus is, “Be boiling! Change the way you think!”*

That lukewarm spirit is a spirit of apathy. That is an interesting word in the Greek. ‘A’ as a prefix in Greek means ‘without’. The last half of the word is pathos. It means feeling or emotion. Apathy then means to not have feelings or

emotions. You just really don't care. God says that is the one thing He can't stomach. Be cold or boiling, but don't be in between.

The Apostle Paul admonishes us to (Romans 12:11 (NIV)) *11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* Zeal is from the Greek word *spoude* – spoo day. We have a family in town with that last name. It means to be diligent, earnest, to hurry, with effort. We are never supposed to be anything less than diligent and in earnest. Fervor comes from the same root word we looked at in Revelation (*zeo*), to boil with heat. Don't simmer! Don't be lukewarm, but keep passionately boiling! Keep your spiritual fervor. So an expanded translation would be, "Never be anything less than diligent, earnest, making an effort, but keep on boiling as you serve the Lord!"

Would you say you were walking in the fullness of the Apostle's instruction? I can tell you I'm not, but I intend to by the grace of God. Forgive me for not being more passionate. One Gallup poll said the number one factor in people choosing a church is the passion of the Pastor. It ought to be the leading of the Holy Spirit. This deciding factor of a passionate pastor is intricately connected with our culture's search for relevance and meaning. We see passionate people as having found a reason to live, something to strive for. What do your neighbors and acquaintances see in you? Has your passion for the good caused them to wonder what you've found?

Why do we lack passion? I think one reason we lack passion is our dullness to the wonder of all that God is doing for us. We allow our hearts to get calloused toward His display of love. "Enough of the tears, I just want to enjoy today", and I dull myself to 'the magic of the moment'. I let busyness fill my mind and numb my heart. The wonder of His interaction in my life, I come to expect as routine, instead of letting my heart be gripped by it. My eyes of faith close as I fix them on the world and troubles around me. And as my eyes of faith close, the realization of God's great love for me begins to fade.

Passion makes us stand out and be noticed, and we feel more comfortable just fitting in. Let's face it, no one likes the person that makes waves and challenges the status quo, and that is what passionate people are always doing. Their passion challenges every lukewarm person they contact, and just like in Jesus' world, they will love or hate you for it. It's so much easier just to blend in. One reason Peter, James, John, and Andrew are mentioned first is their passion. Passion pushed them to the front and opened their mouths. James and John were so passionate they were called the Sons of Thunder. Peter needs no explanation. His passion is his testimony! Andrew was the one that went around recruiting disciples, "We've found the Messiah! We've found the Messiah!"

Another reason for the lack of passion is we haven't seen the purpose God has for our lives. We haven't grabbed hold of His vision for us. Self is our little tiny goal, and that is not very exciting. Then there is the problem of these physically

aging bodies. How can we be boiling when our body is declining? Apathy tends to increase with age. John Maxwell says, "Wise young believers are as rare as zealous old believers." The older we become, the more set in our ways and desirous of the status quo we usually are. It doesn't have to be that way, but that is the tendency of man.

Oh but what a difference when we reject the natural tendencies of man and walk in the Spirit! Your willingness and desire for the fire and passion of God are going to be proportionate with how God uses you. Think of it like this: The person with little passion has little vision and little hope of God accomplishing great things. According to your faith, it will be done unto you. Passion is an ingredient for a life that makes a difference. Passion will increase your will power, your self-discipline, raise the level of your goals, and give you a vision beyond that of ordinary man. Apathetic people put as little on their schedule as they possibly can. Passionate people have schedules that are packed and carefully planned in wisdom to accomplish the most they can possibly do.

Passion touches lives but it also changes you! Augustan said that unless you had something to die for, you haven't begun to live. When I do a word study, I always want to find out how God uses the word in Scripture. When we took a look at the way God used the word 'love', we found that it was almost always defined by a willingness to die. That is passion. That is love that goes beyond reason, beyond intellectual thought. Have you found something you are willing to die for?

The very first definition in Webster's for passion may surprise you. It is the scene that ultimately defines passion. It is the suffering of Christ. That is why we have Passion plays, Passion week. We describe passion by Christ's display of His passion to free us from our sin by dying in our place. The more man abused Him, the more passion He displayed for us. He could have just gone over the hill where the Garden of Gethsemane was and kept on going. Why stay and sweat drops of blood thinking about our sins being placed upon Him? I'll tell you why. He passionately loves you. He could have revealed His glory in that Sanhedrin trial, and they would have all been crying out for mercy. Why didn't He? It was His passion to see you right with God. He could have answered every accusation with such wise clarity that Pilate would have been ashamed not to let Him go, but His passion held His tongue. At any time during His scourging and crucifixion, He could have called a legion of angels to destroy His enemies. Why didn't He? You know the answer. Passion!

In every revelation of God through Jesus we are called to be like Him. You've probably noticed that I use the word Christ-likeness in nearly every sermon. It is God's passionate vision for you. If God is so passionate about us, how should we be toward Him? Have you ever seen a one sided relationship where the wife is so in love with her mate, but the husband is nonchalant? Don't you just want to smack him upside the head and say, "Hey, the girl is head over heels for you!

Don't you get it? Don't you appreciate it?" I think we could all look at the cross – the Passion – and slap ourselves. Get over the numbness, the callous attitude, and get some passion!

What are we about? What is Wayside here for? Are we just being comfortable and happy till Jesus comes for us? That is how you spell APATHY. So what would a passion that reflects the passion Jesus has for us look like? How would it express itself in your life? There is not one answer for all of us. We can generalize, but there is a specific answer for you. Only a passionate heart, willing to behold the cross, will lead you to that answer!

I can wind you up, but I can't give you passion. No one can! Jesus isn't going to hand it to you on a silver platter. He handed it to you already on a bloody cross. You've got to take it and let it heat you up until you boil. What is burning on the inside will manifest itself on the outside in your daily life. It will manifest itself in an intense love for God that will keep you from sin. I'm not saying you'll never make a mistake, but when the question is clear, you won't have to sit down and figure it out. Your passion will have already made the decision. Passion results in a radical commitment – the kind that is willing to not only stand out, but die for the passion you've found. It will affect your work, your leisure, your worship, your home, and every area of your life. It will include the 'all' of the Great Commandment, all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. It will cause a hatred for sin and love for the things of God.

Passion is contagious. (2 Corinthians 9:2) Those who don't run from you will end up being more like you as you become more like Jesus. Why is passion so powerful? God is passionate, and the angels are passionately praising God! The departed saints are passionately worshipping God. All heaven is passionate. Maybe people are getting a glimpse of eternity when they see godly passionate people. The world doesn't see enough of them. It saw a dozen passionate men in the first century, and the world was never the same. Christians have every reason to be the most passionate people on the planet.

How do we find passion? How can we let our hearts boil? Where do we catch the fire of God? You'll have to wait till next week for part two, but you don't have to wait to start passionately responding to His love for you. Be praying for a willingness to become a more zealous person because of His passion for you.

Commented [notes7]: ² For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.
2 Cor. 9:2 (NIV)