

Passion part 2 (Finding Passion) 2-02-03

Last week we identified one of the great needs of mankind, passion. We could see that the Enemy of our soul would rather we were apathetic, as this is the one thing God cannot stomach. A life that is passionately worldly will find the emptiness and meaninglessness of that kind of existence and be challenged to find real meaning. It is the apathetic life that does nothing and goes nowhere that is most disastrous for any culture. It silently draws multitudes toward oblivion without God.

How do we find passion that will motivate our life to rise above this mediocrity to make a difference for the Kingdom of God? How do we find a vision of what God really intends for our life? First you have to have the desire to rise above mediocrity. You may have heard of the young student that went to Socrates asking for wisdom. Socrates took him out into the ocean. He asked him to remind him what it was he wanted. When the young disciple asked again for wisdom, Socrates pushed him underwater and held him there for about 30 seconds. When he let the young man up he asked him again, "What is it you seek?" The young man replied, "Wisdom, oh wise master, wisdom." Socrates held him under a little longer each time until the student finally cried out, "I want air!" Socrates replied, "When you desire wisdom, like you want air, you will learn wisdom." We could say the same for passion. It takes a continuous effort and intense desire on your part to rise out of apathy.

We see passion in the life of Jesus. He resolutely set out to go to the cross (Luke 9:51) because of His passionate love for you. We saw in our study of John, Wednesday evening, how his whole ministry was focused on the time in which He would pay the price for our sins. Though He did not have a sin nature, He was tempted in everyway that you and I are. We would readily point to the fact that He is God and so excuse the indifference in our lives. But the fact is, He was all man, even though He is all God. He woke up tired and sore just like you and I do. He had to find passion to live only for His Father just like you and I do. So where did He get it?

The Scripture doesn't tell us specifically, but it draws some strong inferences. Allow me to speculate just a bit on where the LORD found His intense passion to live only in obedience to the Father. He knew the Word. As a boy he must have studied with all the other children at the local synagogue. He memorized passages from the Scriptures in Hebrew. Most of the children would memorize the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses, and many of the psalms. We can assume that Jesus did also because He often quotes from them. Though Jesus memorized, that alone did not make a big difference. Many of the other children did too, but we don't read about them. The difference was Jesus' application of what He memorized to His life. It wasn't just letters and rules in a book. To Jesus, the Law was a light for His path. It showed Him what to say, how to act, and how to interpret His circumstances. He allowed it to be such a guide to His life that when Satan came to tempt Him, He immediately turns to Scripture to answer. It wasn't a rulebook but a guide for Spirit filled living, revealing the heart of God.

Is that how you see Scripture? We must be honest about our attitudes toward the Word or they will never change for the better. Is the Word really the final say, the authority that reveals the will of a loving God? Then we should turn to it every moment of life. If we aren't

Commented [notes1]: ⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.
Luke 9:51 (NIV)

doing so, we need to consider what our real attitude is. Sadly, many see it as the back-up manual for when things go wrong, or worse yet, a resource to back their opinion. It should be the source of your opinion. The Pastor spoon-feeds it to us, but we can't really get direction from those words ourselves, can we? YES! You can! If you will give it the place of authority it should have it will speak to your daily circumstances. The Word was alive to Jesus. He interacted with it continually. That interaction will help kindle the flame. The more I read the Old Testament, the more I see it was the seed thoughts for Jesus' parables. It was a revelation of the Father's will and heart. Is that what it means to you? Is that how you interact with it?

As we read the Gospels we find that this was not the only thing that stoked Jesus' fire. He would rise before dawn and spend time with His Father. (Mark 1:35) Prayer was the place where Jesus communed with God, hearing His instructions for the day or the decisions that lay before Him. Before He chose the 12 he spent all night in prayer. (Luke 6:12) When faced with His betrayal and the cross, He spent His last free hours in prayer with His Father. To Jesus, prayer was the source of direction and comfort. It was where He connected with all wisdom and strength. It was where He got His marching orders as He went forward into battle against the Prince of Darkness. Looking past this world and into the heavenlies, He was filled with the passion of that realm. His Father kindled a fire of purpose and vision there in that secret place. No threat in this life could extinguish it. He did what the Apostle Paul instructs us to do in Colossians 4:2a. *Devote yourselves to prayer...*

There is at least one more thing that stoked His fire. As He walked in obedience to the Father, He exercised the gifts the Father had given Him. The Apostle Paul told Timothy to, "Fan into flame the gift of God ..." (2 Timothy 1:6-7) That takes some work. The picture in these words is to use a bellows. God will put the spark in us through prayer and His word. Then we have to do something about it. We have to make the effort to stoke it, force air over it, until it erupts into a flame. If it should die down, we need to throw on some more fuel of the Word, either written or spoken to us in prayer. Then we stoke it some more. Passionate people make the effort to fan into a flame the gift that God has given them.

I can tell you that after most Sunday morning services I am exhausted but the fire is burning. He answers my prayer to anoint and speak through me, and when I feel His pleasure! Wow! The fire stoked even more. Use your gifts; see God working and the very thrill of being used of God will fan it into flame. When Jesus had taught His disciples how to evangelize and they returned with testimonies of victory, it sure sounds like His fire was stoked. *"I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven."* (Luke 10:18) When the sick were healed and the dead raised, when a man's sins were forgiven and people saw the light, you know the fire burned in Jesus. In Jesus' life we see the Word in His mind and heart, prayer that kept Him in communion with God, and the exercise of His gifts kept His fire burning. It will do the same for you!

Jesus' glorified appearance is like fire. Consider this vision Ezekiel had of the Lord. Ezek. 1:27 (NIV) *I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him.* The burning bush that Moses saw was a picture of Christ, the physical on fire but not consumed. Get close to Him and you'll catch on fire too! Let Him change you into His image – full of passion!

Commented [notes2]: ³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹² One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 2 Tim. 1:6-7 (NIV)

There is more than one kind of fire. In the book of Leviticus there is one of the more unusual stories of the Bible. Some that do not understand the character of God have a hard time with this passage. In Leviticus 10:1-3 the sons of Aaron decided they would use some other (strange) fire than that which God had given. God had lit the fire of the altar with fire from heaven. The fire for the incense was to come from the God given fire. But in disobedience to God, they decided to do it their own way. "We'll do the God's thing, but just do it our own way." Maybe it was easier, or maybe they were experimenting, I don't know for sure, but I do know God continually has grace upon our rebellion. If at anytime He chooses to exercise judgment because of our bold and arrogant rebellion, He is perfectly just in doing so. Fire came out from the altar and they were struck dead. Aaron wanted to complain, but Moses reminded him that God had warned them that to whoever approaches Him, He would show Himself as holy. He didn't say merciful, but holy! Arrogant disobedience in the most sacred things of God brought about judgment that caused others to have a healthy respect and fear of God.

I think there is a spiritual picture there of doing God's work man's way. We can get a natural kind of emotion and excitement that is very similar to this strange fire. You see men that rant and yell, and yet you sense very little of the anointing of God. They have fire, just not the fire of God. Two days later you've forgotten what all the hype was about. Passion is not about volume or gestures or expressions. It's about a passionate heart for God. Jonathan Edward's was one of the pastors of the Great Awakening. He was nearsighted and had to keep his face about ten inches away from his sermon to read it. But He had a holy fire. People clung white-knuckled to the pews for fear of falling into hell. It is not about an outward expression but often manifests itself outwardly. The issue is really what is happening in the heart. God's fire is a work of God, not of man, though man must cooperate and work with Him.

Let me tell you the stories of some men that made the effort to fan the fire of passion into a flame. John Welsh kept a coat by his bedside at night. When the Lord would awaken him he'd drop to his knees, throwing his coat around him, and begin praying. His wife would often say to him, "Honey, you better get your rest. You've got a full day of work to do tomorrow." He'd answer, "Dear, I have many souls in my charge and I do not know how it is with them." While on his knees before God the fire burned within him.

Bishop Asbury was on his face every morning between 4 and 6 a.m. You know that as he met with God that embers were fanned into flames. Payson prayed in the same place so regularly that his knees wore grooves in the hardwood floor where he knelt and talked with God.

John Wesley was a passionate man. Several times he told his secret. "I just set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn." What fueled the flames in John Wesley? He spent 2 hours every morning with His God. Benjamin Franklin confessed that he often went to hear Whitefield preach just to watch him burn before his very eyes. That man of faith and prayer, David Brainerd, said, "I love to be alone in my cottage where I can spend much time with God in prayer." No wonder he was such a man of faith. While he prayed the fire burned. He was a missionary to the American Indians. Listen to one of his written prayers and feel the fire. "Oh, that I might be a flaming fire in the service of the Lord. Here I am, Lord, send me; send me to the ends of the earth... send me from all that is called earthly comfort; send me even to death itself if it be but in Thy service and to promote Thy kingdom."

Bishop Andrews prayed five hours every day! No wonder the fire of God was in his bones. Adoniram Judson saw his wife die in jail, had to beg nursing mothers to feed his starving infant, was forsaken by his supporters, but he never quit evangelizing. What caused the fire to burn so strongly that children on the streets of New York called him Old Glory Face? Seven days a week he spent 2 to 3 hours a day in prayer with God. He met with God at 6a.m and then again at 9. He met with God at noon and then at 3p.m. and 6p.m. He met with God at 9p.m. and again at midnight and at 3a.m. He left behind dozens of churches where the Gospel had previously not been preached.

Duncan Campbell hungered for the presence of God more than anything. At times Jesus was more real to him than his earthly friends. He was known to spend the whole night in prayer with God before a meeting was to begin. People remarked of seeing the Shekinah glory of God on his face. Islands where he ministered fell so under the power of God that visitors, after setting foot on the island, would seek out a church to find salvation.

These are men who were enthusiastic. The very word means in (en) God (theos). When God gets the fire of His Holy Spirit in us we have a supernatural enthusiasm. The passion and power of heaven come with the Holy Spirit.

A traveler was anxious to see where the Scotsman, Robert Murray McCheyne, preached. He went to his church and was met by an old gray haired deacon. He was led into McCheyne's study and invited to sit in his chair at McCheyne's desk. With a bit of reluctance but great excitement the traveler sat down. There on the desk in front of him was an open Bible. The old deacon said, "Now drop your head there on that open Bible and weep. That is what our minister did every Sunday morning before he preached." The presence of God was so manifestly present upon McCheyne that before he said a word, people would begin to weep.

Was it passion that drove them to prayer or was it prayer that fired their passion? They got close to Jesus and He caught them on fire! One thing you can say for sure, they refused to leave their first love. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he mentioned their love several times. Just a short 30 years later Jesus wrote the same church a letter through John the Beloved. He warned them that they had abandoned their first love. It seemed like they had everything else right, but without that first love, everything else meant little. Jesus warned them that they had fallen from a great height.

Everyone that I mentioned had an intimacy with God that kept their first love a flame of fire. You need a flame from God first and foremost. John the Baptist said that Jesus had come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The flame must be allowed to burn up all that supercedes Him, and only then it can set your very soul ablaze. Then you need to fan the flame and care for it with communion with God as Jesus and these men demonstrated with their lives. The results are quite visible.

The founder of the Salvation Army, General Booth, warned his ranks, "The tendency of the fire is to go out; watch the fire on the altar of your heart." One of the jobs of the Old Testament Levites was to be sure that the altar fire never went out. We must always guard our old nature from taking the way of the Ephesians. We are in constant need of recommitment and renewed consecration. We all need revival again and again. We are warned in

1 Thessalonians 5:19 to not put out the Spirit's fire.

But please don't misunderstand. "No one is more zealous than a deceived fanatic. There is an infinite difference between the zeal of the sinful nature and the passion born of the Holy Spirit. Self-born zeal is self-conscious. Passion for Christ and for souls is a consuming fire that so possesses the Spirit-filled Christian one is almost unaware of it." (Wesley Duewel) Strange fire brings death to you and to other with whom you share it. The fire of God brings death to self but life to those it comes in contact with.

I find my passion in looking afresh at the passion Christ had for me to go to the cross. There has never been a greater display of passion. While I was still a rebel against Him, He displayed the ultimate expression of love; He laid down His life for me. Taking on the sins of the world and the onslaught of hell was so horrific; we will never understand the utter darkness of it. He knew how horrible it would be and asked if there was some other way, if there could be found any other means to make you and me right with God, to please go for plan B. There was no plan B that could satisfy the justice and righteousness of God. When He saw that was the only way, as horrible as it was, He looked at an eternal future with us redeemed and forever seated at the right hand of God in Him, and He said, "Yes! I will do it. To please the Father and to save them from destruction, I will pay the price, endure the horror."

Love begets love. When we see His love that was displayed on the cross, when you are willing to not turn your head but to stare there and drink in all you can perceive, how can your heart not overflow with love in return. The love of God has been made visible to us, right there. Love that doesn't cost anything isn't worth much. Love that costs everything is priceless. That is where I find my worth, my meaning, my purpose, my life, my passion, and my all. What does our little squabbling about the inconsequential mean in the light of the cross? It makes me want to throw everything else aside and just live in the shadow of it. That is passion!

But go on a little further. He redeemed you to live through you. You have a divine purpose in life. Once you get the vision that your life has purpose that affects all eternity, you marvel that God would be willing to use the little insignificant rebel, you. Who but God could turn a traitor into a hero? But He does that so that He gets all the glory, and yet, He will share that glory with you, if you are willing to suffer with Him. What an honor and blessing and wonder that the God of all creation would want to include us in what He does, but that is what co-laboring is all about. He delights in working with us. That just makes my head spin. It just shows how mighty He is. And if fans my flame of passion! As you see Jesus' passion for you in the Word, in prayer and in the use of your gifts, your passion should increase. Do you really desire passion? If not, you need the fire of God. Ask Him for it! If you do, you probably have that ember of fire from the Holy Spirit. Now you just need to fan and fuel it! If you really want passion, you will take the time to fuel it by drawing near to Jesus in His Word and in prayer. You will exercise your gifts at the leading of the Holy Spirit. You'll pump the bellows by taking time to have intimate communion with God. You are going to leave here this morning in continued apathy, or with a decision to fan into the flame the gift of God in you. It will probably take a reprioritizing of your time. How strongly do you want to be a passionate person? You will leave here this morning quenching the fire or determined to fan it into a flame. It is your decision, and it will affect the outcome of your life.