

St Martins C3 – July 30, 2023

Passionate Followers

Sermon Notes:

Passion is important. Great speeches are laced with it, champion sportspeople are full of it, and ideas become reality because of it, it is the fire for our relationships. Our relationship with God and our work for God needs it too.

In Acts 20, Paul goes close to Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem where he knows trouble awaits him. So, he calls the elders to him to say goodbye. As he does, he explains his ministry to them, and we see the picture of someone who devoted everything to passionately following the Jesus who saved him.

Read Acts 20:18-38

Like Paul, we are passionate followers when our whole existence is devoted to God. But sometimes we lose our spark and often it is because of the three “C’s”.

Comfort

We have a pretty settled existence. Yet, when we embrace comfort and slip into the routine we can become apathetic. Following Jesus is incompatible with a life of comfort.

Conformity

Conformity is when we start desiring to live life the way others do and allow other passions to take hold. Conformity to the world around us hardens our hearts to God and extinguishes His fire. It’s like salt on a fat fire.

Competence

The most unChristian thing you can think of is that you are good at Christianity. At that moment your reliance becomes upon yourself, not upon God. Prayers dry up and you stop growing.

To reignite passion consider the past, present and future.

The Past and the Future

When we each became a Christian we were awakened by the work of Christ on the cross. What he did in the past ignites us.

Then there is the future. When God's future victory becomes my current prospect I live with passion. Hope in the resurrection leads to a passion to be devoted to God now.

We have more passion when we think about what Christ has done. We have more passion when we consider what Christ has won.

Present

Read Romans 12:8-12

Obedience is one key to being a passionate follower of Jesus. The more we unquestioningly follow Jesus the more passion we will live with. Once we know He has asked us to do something we commit to doing it straight away.

Intimacy is another key. We need to stay completely focussed on God. Passionate followers immerse themselves in the thing they are following. Immerse ourselves in Him and spend time every day conscious of His presence in your life.

Questions for Connect Groups:

What stood out to you from today's message?

What does it mean to be a passionate follower of Jesus?

Which of comfort, conformity and competence stands out to you as a killer of passion for God?

How can you eliminate these three things from your life?

Do you think you're a pretty good Christian? How do you measure it and why might this be a bad thing?

How do we reignite our passion for God if we have lost it?

Think of the time you were most passionate about God. Why was that? What did it look like?

How often do you spend time thinking about what Christ has won on the cross? How could that fuel passion?

How often do you spend time thinking about what life will be like in the world to come? How could that fuel passion?

Discuss this quote: "The question we should ask is - what's the shortest time possible to obey God?"

How can you grow in intimacy with God?

Songs from Today:

Majesty (O The Mystery), King of Glory, Christ Be Magnified, Jesus You Alone, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Monday Devotion: Passion Personified

Read Hebrews 12:1-4

This week in our devotions we are going to look at some examples of passion, exploring Biblical characters who had it, lost it or kept it. The greatest of all these examples is found in Jesus.

In Hebrews 11, we have learned about many of the ones who have passionately run the race that God has for them. They gave all of themselves because they had exuberant and ongoing faith in God.

Now the encouragement comes for us to join them in living with faith. The example that is given is Jesus.

Think of all that Jesus went through and what it cost Him to endure the torture of the cross. He did it all for “the joy set before him”. That joy was the joy of all the cross would achieve, the redemption of all people and the renewal of all creation.

As we keep our eyes on Jesus the champion who authors and perfects our faith we too can complete the race that He has for us. We need to spend time focusing on Jesus and all He has done for us to have the same single-minded focus that He had – persevering difficulties with joy.

Today, take the time to reflect on what Christ has done for you and on the way you can give yourself more fully to Him.

Tuesday Devotion: Passion Stolen

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

Elijah went through a lot. After he prophesied a drought for Israel, he had a price on his head. He was fed by ravens for a time but then returned for a showdown with the prophets of Baal.

This was the moment of Elijah's greatest passion. He gave everything for God and saw the prophets of Baal defeated and killed. He saw the rain come and the drought broke. He outran a chariot. But then Queen Jezebel came after him and he'd had enough and ran away as far and as fast as he could.

Four-hundred evil prophets. Easy.
The forces of nature. Piece of cake.
Outrun a chariot. Sweet as.
An angry Queen. I'm outta here.

Conflict can eat away at us, and life can seem too hard, it can affect our mental health like it did with Elijah. Yet, God was with Elijah through his difficulty, sustaining him and calling him forward. He can do the same for us.

Life's hardships can make us more passionate about God. The most passionate followers of God I know are the ones who suffer for following Jesus but choose to do it anyway. Bring your difficulty to God today and make it a cause for greater reliance on Him.

Wednesday Devotion: Passion For Ministry

Read Nehemiah 3:20

Nehemiah 3 is one of those passages you dread when you read the Bible. It has as much interest as one of the genealogy lists. It is an account of all the people who helped to rebuild the sections of the wall around Jerusalem. It is interesting to see the scale of the work and the numbers who contributed but the names mean little to us.

Yet amid this list there is a rather curious description of Baruch son of Zabbai who “zealously repaired an additional section from the angle of the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.”

How does one repair a wall in such a way that causes it to be described as “zealously”? Everyone was working hard, the pace at which they repaired the wall was remarkable. But there was something even more remarkable about Baruch son of Zabbai.

What if we served God in such a way that others would take note of it and say, “The way that you led Kids Church / was a Connect Group leader / helped set up / etc. was done zealously”?

God calls each of us to serve His Kingdom. Take some time to think through what you are doing and how you can do it with passion this week.

Thursday Devotion: Passion for Life

Read Daniel 6:1-28

Knowing that we will be with Christ in eternity might cause some to lose their passion as they age. Passion seems like something just for young people. Yet, the Biblical example is of many who loved God with the same passion as they did when they were young.

Daniel was in his 70s when the King declared that all people must only pray to the regent. Daniel was the most respected man in the Kingdom. He had already done so much for his people and proved that he was a zealous follower of God.

Instead of resting on what He had done, Daniel devoted himself again to his God. He went into His room and prayed, as he had always done. These are the actions of a man passionate about God. His passionate devotion led to a miraculous delivery that has been spoken of for thousands of years. It also led to the name of the one true God being proclaimed to all the known world of the time.

May we decide that, like Daniel, we are going to passionately follow Jesus all our lives. One way we can do this is to commit to our continual development. Don't give up on the personal transformation God is doing in your character, personality, and holiness.

Pray today that God would show you the areas that He is still working on and commit to seeing Him bring change in those places.

Friday Devotion: Passion Everyday

One way to restore our passion is to spend time in God's word, prayerfully pondering how it might change our lives. Today, let's read Psalm 1 and consider how we might be filled with passion. Read it through and ask God to highlight a phrase or word to take into your weekend.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the one

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,*

*² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

*³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.*

*⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.*

*⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

*⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*