

“Making a Difference in the World”
“Restoring Our Passion for Life” - Part 2
Revelation 3:14-22
preached on March 14, 2010

We begin today looking at the words that Jesus gave to the last of the seven Revelation churches. It's not a very pleasant message because the church is told that they make God nauseous; that when he looks at them he wants to throw up. And it is all because they are neither hot nor cold. They have no passion. If we want to make a difference in the world, and that is what I've been talking about in this series, we need commitment. We need integrity. And we need passion. Yet our society suppresses passion. We are told to stay cool, unmoved, as though nothing matters. Yet God created us with passion, to be passionate. As it says in the biblical paraphrase, "The Message", we are to *"Love the Lord your God with all your passion, all your prayer, all your intelligence, all your energy."* If we are going to be disciples of Jesus, we are to be passionate about our love for God and our love for others. In Colossians 3:23 it says, *"Whatever you do, do it with all your heart as unto the Lord and not as unto men."* No matter what we do, we are to do it passionately. With all our heart. Never do anything half-hearted. If you're going to do it, do it with all your heart.

There are seven passion killers with which we battle. Last week we looked at the first three: 1. An Unclear Purpose, because if we don't have a purpose, we have no reason to act; 2. An Unemployed Talent, which frustrates us to the point that we just don't care; and 3. An Unbalanced Schedule, either giving without taking the time to be renewed, or studying and learning without putting the principles of faith into action. A lack of action leads to a lack of passion. These things slowly, steadily destroy our soul, our heart, our will, and our passion. And there are four more passion killers.

4. AN UNCONFESSED SIN

Few things can rob us of our joy more quickly than the guilt of unconfessed sin. We're always surprised by that, because usually we rationalize our sins, trying to convince ourselves that it was not our fault, or that our words, our actions were justified, and then we try to suppress it. But the memory of those sins have a life all their own. We may not think about it consciously, but subconsciously, they wreck havoc on our lives. Psalm 38 *"My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. I am bowed down and brought low."* We cannot feel enthusiastic and guilty at the same time. Our guilt trumps our passion.

On a computer if we try to write different information to the same channel at the same time, the computer will crash. It can't handle the overload. It works the same way with us. Some of you might be in the midst of a personal crash right now. You want to be enthusiastic about life but the guilt from an unconfessed sin is crashing your system and your joy. Now when a computer crashes, our first instinct is to panic and yell, "What do I do now?" It happens in our personal lives as well. But the real question is, "How can I solve the problem of guilt?" Fortunately, it's not too tough. 1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, God can be trusted to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* We go to God, confess our sins, especially those we don't want to acknowledge, and ask for forgiveness. We ask for a new beginning, to start again.

Jesus said that we are to be of an attitude of prayer. That means that at any time of any day, our natural inclination is to talk to God. Our life is to be a running conversation with God, sharing our joys and our sorrows. If we are honest and open with God, even when we slip and fall short of the glory of God, still we are on sound footing. Our integrity remains in tact. And our connection, our

relationship with God is secure. It is that right relationship with God that gives us peace. It is that relationship that gives us joy, and a life worth living. It is that relationship that fuels our passion.

5. AN UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

Have you ever started a day with a song in your heart: “zip-a-dy do-dah. Zip-pi-dy-a, my oh my, what a wonderful day, plenty of sunshine heading my way,” and then out of no where, an angry thought or an irritating word takes all the zip-a-dy out of your do-dah? An unresolved conflict has taken a big bite out of your heart, and the passion drains right through you. Life goes flat, like a tire without air. Sometimes at our work or in our homes, we live in constant conflict. It seems like we can’t do anything about it. We can’t change it. What can we do? How do we stop the leak? How do we maintain our passion?

If we want to remain passionate even in the midst of the conflicts in which we dwell, we have to either avoid or deal with three passion killing emotions: resentment, jealousy, and prolonged anger. Out of Job we hear, *“Resentment destroys the fool and jealousy kills the simple.”* (5:2) and *“You are only hurting yourself with your anger.”* (18:4) Those three words, resentment, jealousy, and anger, will kill our passion every time. That’s why forgiveness is so important. That’s why God teaches us again and again to forgive others. He knows what it does to us. If I hold on to my anger, I’m allowing others, through that resentment, to control my emotions. And eventually, they take control of my life, and destroy my passion. I become so focused on the pain and destruction of others that I fail to do anything constructive for myself. So if we want our passion back, we’ve got to learn to forgive. We’ve got to learn to let go.

We are constantly seeing the Middle East explode in the continuing conflict between Arabs and Jews. It is fueled even deeper by a very radical group of Muslims. Now politically, and even more as a student of scripture, I firmly believe that we need to support Israel with our friendship and our prayers, for the Jews are still God’s chosen people. We need to respect that. But why does this war continue to be fought? Because the most important mission of Hamas, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda, is the total destruction of Israel. They want Israel pushed into the sea and wiped off the face of the earth. The main issue uniting the Arab community is not the worship of Allah, but the hatred of Israel. Their focus has been on destroying others rather than improving themselves. And throughout history it has had a devastating affect on the Middle East, and the entire world.

I have seen that in politics, globally and locally. And I’ve also seen it with individuals. Some people are so intent on getting back at others, that they have done tremendous damage to themselves and their families, to those that they claim to be protecting and loving. It is only through forgiveness that we can truly move forward in life. And when we move forward, when we make positive things happen, our hearts can look up; our lives can be lifted up. Hope can resound, and passion will be found to be our constant companion.

6. AN UNSUPPORTED LIFESTYLE

Sometimes we take the myth of the rugged individualist too far, too literally, and we try to go through life on our own. Then loneliness puts our passion at risk. We’ve talked about this before. God never meant for life to be a solo act. *“It is not good for this human one to be alone.”* (Genesis 2:28) This speaks not just of marriage, but of relationships. We were made to live in loving, intimate relationships with God, and with one another. Even our judicial system knows that because our most serious form of punishment is solitary confinement. We need others who can help support us, and be supported by us. We need people in our life who can be there when problems hit, and they will hit. Together we can overcome difficulties that we could never deal with on our own. We need

people who can encourage us, support us; who can kick us in our attitude when we need a good kick. On our own, without help, we can easily be overwhelmed, and then our passion will drain and wane.

Ecclesiastics 4 *“Two are better than one, because if one falls down his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls down and has no one to help him up”* If we have no intimate relationships in our life, we are cheating ourselves. Who’s going to be there when we need help? And a great place to build those relationships is in a Sunday School class or small group. I have often seen how much members of classes and small groups care about one another, and how much they reach out to help and support one another. Of course, you might be one of those lucky ones who don’t need any help. Then you really do need help, because you don’t even know how much trouble you’re in. We need good friends. We need godly friends; brothers and sisters who will stand by us. If we try to do it all by our self, our passion is going to dissipate. And it can happen real quick. To restore the passion, we must stop the leaks. And to do that, we need the help of those around us.

The seventh passion killer is the worst of all, because it’s at the root of all the others.

7. AN UNDERNOURISHED SPIRIT

Passion is a spiritual issue. It’s a matter of the heart. We can’t restore passion with money. A pill won’t fix the problem. A government program won’t do the trick. As I said a few weeks ago, the heart of our problem is a problem of the heart. Passion comes from within the heart. We’re more than just a body. God gave us a spirit. He gave us the ability to talk with him, commune with him, connect with him. He gave us passion. To restore our passion, we must nourish our spirit.

Every week, circumstances and situations conspire to shrink our hearts and shrivel our souls. Like when people are rude to us. Or when they criticize or misjudge us. Situations that bring us face to face with disappointment and frustration. Because we are alive, we are going to face problems, and we are going to face pain. There will be worries and fears that drain us, that wipe us out physically, emotionally, spiritually. We’ve got to nourish our spirits, or our hearts will grow cold and hard. Our spirits will shrink and shrivel, like a prune without the sweetness, although we still might have the same affect of a prune on everyone we meet. We don’t want that. We want to be fully alive. So many people die long before they die. They let their heart, their spirit shrink and shrivel like a prune.

What’s the antidote? We intentionally nourish and feed our spirit. How do we do that? Colossians 2 *“Just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust Him, too, for each day’s problems; live in vital union with Him. Let your roots grow down into Him and draw up nourishment from Him. See to it that you go on growing in the Lord and become strong and vigorous.”* If we want passion, we’ve got to get plugged into God. Develop a daily, growing, vital, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ so your spiritual roots can grow deep into God’s word; spend time with the Lord in prayer so you can be restored and renewed spiritually day by day. We have to have it.

God is passionate. When we talk about the death of Jesus on a cross at Calvary, we call it His passion. A re-enactment of the crucifixion is called a Passion Play. The passion of the Lord is always on display. It’s out there for all the world to see. It must be, for His passion is to get to know us, and for us to get to know Him. Exodus 34 *“You must worship only the Lord, for He is a God who is passionate about His relationship with you.”* That is mind boggling, and hard to understand for many. But the Creator of the universe, the One who made all of this, who made each of us, that God who can do anything, thinks the most important thing in all creation is you. And living with you, in you, is the most important item on His agenda. He is passionate about having a relationship with you. If you don’t get excited about that, you don’t understand the implications of it. The Creator of

the universe wants us to know Him and invites us into an intimate, vital, passionate relationship with Him. What an opportunity that lies before us, all because God loves us passionately, and He wants us to love him passionately in return.

C.S. Lewis once said, “The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.” If Jesus is who He says He is, if He saved us from all our sins and did what He said He was going to do, if God’s Word is true, it deserves everything we’ve got. He’s not a part of life, a piece of life. He is life, wholly and completely. And if that’s not true, we might as well close up shop because we are just wasting our time here. But I’m not ready to lock the door and put a >For Sale’ sign out front. Because I know whom I’ve believed. I know his power and his grace. With him, in him there is love, and grace, and strength. And the only thing that can diminish His power in our lives, in our world, is our lack of passion. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. >Casual Christian’ is a contradiction of terms. We’re either passionate about loving God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength, or we are not Christian at all.

This series is about making a difference in our world. When we look at the people who’ve made the greatest impact, we see those who are most passionate. They weren’t the smartest, wealthiest, best-educated, or most beautiful people. But they were people of passion. Passionate people are world changers. Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Billy Graham, Paul of Tarsus, David - passionate men and women who said, “There’s a passion burning within my bones, a fire within my soul that requires me to step out, to reach out. Because I care, I must act, that business as usual will not be usual any more. Through the power and passion of the Lord I will make things happen, even if the world has to change to do it.” If we’re going to make a difference in our world, our family, our community, we’re going to have to be passionate.

And the amazing thing is, we used to be. All new Christians start out that way. There is a natural passion in a new believer. When we first experience the power of that connection with God we are excited and enthused. We are passionate. That’s the mountaintop experience. But then we come down from the mountain and the passion wanes and drains, and our energy and excitement disappears. So is the Lord speaking to us in the Revelation when he says, “*You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you’ve fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.*” He gives us both our problem and the solution; our lack of passion, and a way to bring that passion back to life. Recall those days when your connection to the Lord was fresh and new. Remember the power and the excitement of experiencing the touch of God upon your life. Remember the days when you were on fire spiritually and your passion soared. Turn your life toward God again, and start nourishing your spirit. Spend time with God in scripture and prayer. Become the person God created you to be, that the world might be blessed; that our passion might make a positive difference in the world. It’s not rocket science. It is the love of God entering our lives, touching our hearts, igniting the fires of passion that help us make miraculous things happen. We can make miracles happen. We can make miracles happen even here. We can change the world if we make the commitment; if we have the integrity; if we have the passion. Lord, let the miracles begin. And in your life may it be so. Amen.