

A Passion for the Lost

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

Everything worthwhile in life is the result of someone's passion. Significant events of human history are the result of people's deep and consuming desires to see goals fulfilled. As believers our consuming desire should be to see the gospel reach the world. However, we live in an age that tends to dull our sharpness. Our culture obscures legitimate goals and would rob our faith of its fiery power if given the chance. Indeed, some Christians are a cold bath for the fiery heart. They just don't understand someone with a passionate concern about a spiritual enterprise, because spiritual passion is not the norm. The norm is not to let Christianity disrupt your lifestyle. If you follow that, your spiritual temperature will drop and you'll become apathetic. We all have to ask ourselves, Where is our burden for evangelism? Why isn't evangelism the church's central function? Is the church only a self-indulgent activity center, content with comfort and prosperity?

Valiant men and women of God mark church history's greatest ages. Their power came from a passion for holiness and evangelizing the lost. One example is Robert Murray McCheyne, one of Scotland's greatest preachers, who died when he was only twenty-nine. A biographer wrote that everywhere he stepped, Scotland shook. Whenever he opened his mouth, a spiritual force seemed to sweep in every direction. Thousands followed him to the feet of Christ. A traveler, eager to see where McCheyne had preached, went to his old church. An old sexton agreed to give him a tour. He led the way into McCheyne's study. "Sit in that chair," he ordered. The traveller hesitated a moment, then sat in the chair. On the table before him was an open Bible. "Drop your head in that book and weep. That is what our minister always did before he preached," said the old man. He then led the visitor into the pulpit before another open Bible. "Stand there," he said, "and drop your head on your hands and let the tears flow. That is the way our minister always conducted himself before he began to preach!" (cf. Cortland Myers, *How Do We Know?*). With such a passion for God's Word and the souls of the lost, is it any wonder the Holy Spirit used McCheyne to draw so many to the Savior?

And there are other examples. Because John Knox's yearning for lost souls was so great, it was thought his pulpit would break into pieces. And it was said John Wesley did more for England than her armies and navies. He lived meagerly, having given away thousands of dollars in his lifetime. Abused and maligned, he left his reputation and soul in the hands of God. It has been estimated he traveled 225 thousand miles on foot and horseback and preached twenty-four hundred sermons. Much of the established church despised him, but he brought fire into her cold heart. Wesley looked on all the world as his parish. He had the reputation of being out of breath pursuing souls.

There was also George Whitefield. Once ordained at age twenty-two, he began preaching with tremendous eloquence and effect. John Newton viewed him as the greatest preacher of his day. His power came from his passion for souls, and he used every God-given ability to lead men to Christ. He once wrote that if his life was in danger of nestling down, God--out of pity--should place a thorn

into his nest! He crossed the Atlantic thirteen times and preached thousands of sermons. His gravestone reads that he was a soldier of the cross, humble, devout, and ardent, preferring the honor of Christ to his own interest, reputation, or life.

LESSON

As wonderful as all those examples are, the perfect example of One having a passion for lost men and women is Jesus Christ. How do we know He had such a concern? Because His forerunner was an evangelist, He Himself was an evangelist, He trained evangelists, and He commanded His followers to evangelize.

I. CHRIST'S FORERUNNER WAS AN EVANGELIST

That forerunner was John the Baptist, who introduced the Savior to the world: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

A. John's Message (Matt. 3:1-6)

"Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!'" Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."

His message of repentance was a call for the people to turn from their sin to God's kingdom, which would soon be introduced by the King Himself, Jesus Christ. So it was a preparatory message for the Lord's coming. He wore rough clothing and ate wild food. Nothing about his form or person was attractive. But his life and message were powerful, for people from all over came to hear him and be baptized.

B. John's Method (Matt. 3:7-12)

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father"; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His

threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

That was the direct method! But where are the thundering evangelists today? Where has the passion for evangelism gone? John 5:35 says John the Baptist was "the lamp that was burning ... and shining." Jesus' forerunner was a fiery evangelist, which tells us the Lord had a commitment to save the lost.

II. CHRIST HIMSELF WAS AN EVANGELIST

A. His Public Preaching

Matthew 4:17 says, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Christ's message echoed what John preached. He preached of coming judgment, confession of sin, and repentance. When Christ went to the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues and healing people, we find Him evangelizing others. Matthew 9:35 says He was "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom." The word gospel means "good news." What was that good news? That God was providing a Savior for the forgiveness of sins.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Christ gave this invitation: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." Jesus was referring to the heavy loads of religious traditions that the Pharisees and scribes laid on the people (Matt. 23:4). Jesus called the people to turn from relying on their religious works and come to Him. His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is perhaps the greatest evangelistic sermon ever recorded. It states the divine standard all must meet to be in Christ's kingdom. But no man or woman can meet that standard apart from divine enabling. Thus the only proper response is to embrace Christ as Savior and Lord.

Furthermore, Christ repeatedly called for people to come to Him in faith: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29); "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35); "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh" (John 6:50); "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37); "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12); "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). So constantly He proclaimed a message of salvation.

B. His Personal Witness

Our Lord brought Philip (John 1:43), Matthew (Matt. 9:9), Peter, and Andrew (Matt. 4:18-19) to faith with the call, "Follow Me." In John 4 He met a woman at a well and brought her to salvation. In Luke 19 He found Zaccheus, a tax collector, whom He led to a confession of sin, repentance, and faith. In John 3 He taught Nicodemus about the new birth. In Mark 10 He led blind Bartimaeus to believe in Him. And in Mark 5 Jesus met a demon-possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes. Jesus sent

the demons into a herd of swine, which hurried into the sea and drowned. The man wanted to go with Jesus, but the Lord wanted him to stay as His witness.

Jesus deeply cared for individuals. Luke 23 tells of His brief yet poignant encounter with the thief on the cross (vv. 40-43). Before committing Himself to God, Christ rescued him from eternal hell. John 5:40 gives a glimpse of Christ's passion: "You are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life." There's a pensive quality to those words. His heart grieved over the souls of lost men and women.

C. His Evangelistic Qualities

Christ is the perfect model to imitate in witnessing to others.

1. He was available

Although there were times of retreat, Jesus was regularly among the people. He took time for others even though He was busy.

2. He wasn't partial

Often Jesus was with lepers, common people, prostitutes, and tax collectors--those belonging to the lower classes socially and morally. But He also helped a Roman centurion, a man of dignity and stature (Matt. 8:5-13), and ministered to wealthy Jairus, whose daughter needed a miracle (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43). Jesus reflected the mind of God, who is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

3. He was sensitive

Jesus was sensitive to the pain of a sinner. In Mark 5 a lady with a hemorrhage for twelve years reached out and touched Christ's garment. With sensitivity to her plight, Christ responded, "Who touched My garments?" (v. 30). Out of all the people around Him, He noticed that one poor woman and her need (vv. 31-34). He also touched a leper (Luke 5:12-15), which was an unthinkable act to the Jewish mind (cf. Lev. 13:45-46).

4. He secured a public confession

Jesus also drew out a verbal confession from those who believed in Him. The blind man (John 9:1-41), the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34), the Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19), and others confessed Christ before others.

III. CHRIST TRAINED EVANGELISTS

As Jesus was "walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (Matt. 4:18-22).

Jesus said He would make those fishermen fishers of men. Now fishermen used special tools for catching fish. One was a line and hook (Matt. 17:27). Another was a spear or possibly a type of harpoon (Job 41:26). A third was the dragnet (Matt. 13:47). Used in deeper water, it was sometimes over 300 feet long and about eight feet wide. Fishermen buoyed up one side with corks and weighed down the other side with lead sinkers. Sometimes the method was to stretch the net between two boats rowing in a circle. They would then draw in ropes attached to the bottom of the net, trapping the fish (John 21:6). Matthew 4, however, speaks of a casting net, which had a circular form (about fifteen feet in diameter) made of fine mesh and lead sinkers around the edge. Attaching a long piece of line to the center of the net, the fisherman would cast it into shallow water. He then would draw up the center of the net by its cord and wade into the water to secure the catch. So the Lord was saying He wanted His disciples to catch a school of men.

IV. CHRIST COMMANDED HIS FOLLOWERS TO EVANGELIZE

We have a calling in the Great Commission to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19-20). In Acts 1:8 Jesus says, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." We are to evangelize the world.

How can we enhance our passion for the lost? First, study Christ: His great love, compassion, and tender mercy. We can study great men and women in church history, but ultimately we must come to Christ and grasp His heart. As 1 John 2:6 says, "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." So we need to preoccupy ourselves with Christ by meditating on His Word, not pursuing life's trivia.

Second, study sin: its guilt, power, and penalty. That will make you aware of how we have all fallen prey to the subtleties of the world. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Let that remind you to be preoccupied not with worldly things, but with evangelizing the lost.

Third, study sinners. Try to cultivate love and sympathy for them, not bitterness. Note that the most zealous evangelists are often new converts. When a person comes to Christ, he has an acute awareness that everyone around him is lost. Many of us have lost that awareness. Fourth, study Scripture. See what it says about hell, death, judgment, and salvation. And finally pray for God to give you a passion for evangelism.

CONCLUSION

All believers are responsible to have a passion for the lost. John Harper had such a passion. He was a newly called pastor to the great Moody Church in Chicago in the early 1900s. His character came to the attention of the Christian world in the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. Shortly after the ship struck

an iceberg, Harper was leaning against a rail, pleading with a young man to come to Christ. Four years after the ship's sinking, a young Scotsman rose in a meeting and said he was a survivor of the Titanic. As he drifted in the water on a piece of wood, he came across John Harper, who was afloat on a piece of wreckage. Harper pleaded for the young man to receive Christ. The young man refused. The tide brought Harper around again, and Harper asked if he was saved yet. Shortly after, Harper disappeared into the water, and the young man decided to trust Christ as Savior. At the meeting he identified himself as John Harper's last convert. Cannot we be the John Harpers of this generation?

Focusing on the Facts

1. The norm is to not let Christianity disrupt your . What will following that do to you?
2. Describe the ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne.
3. Describe the ministry of John Wesley.
4. The perfect example of someone with passion for saving the lost is _____ .
5. Who was the forerunner of Christ? What was his message?
6. What was Christ's message?
7. Define gospel.
8. How is Matthew 5-7 evangelistic?
9. Give at least three examples of Christ's calling people to embrace Him in faith.
10. Give at least five examples of people to whom Christ witnessed personally.
11. Describe the evangelistic qualities of Christ.
12. What analogy did Christ use to train evangelists? Why did He use that analogy (Matt. 4:18-22)?
13. True or false: Christ did not command His followers to evangelize.
14. What are five ways to develop a passion for the lost? Briefly explain each.

Pondering the Principles

1. Every Christian is to have a passion for the lost to be found. However, the busyness of our schedules and the mind-set of our culture can obscure that passion. Richard Baxter said, "Time must be redeemed from worldly business and commodity, when matters of greater weight and commodity do require it. Trades, and plough, and profit must stand by, when God calls us (by necessity or otherwise) to greater things. Martha should not so much as trouble herself in providing meat for Christ and his followers to eat, when Christ is offering her food for her soul, and she should with Mary have been hearing at his feet.... Time must be redeemed from smaller duties, which in their season must be done, as being no duties, when they hinder greater duty which should then take place" (The Practical Works of Richard Baxter, vol. 1 [Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990 reprint], pp. 231-32). Take time to reevaluate your priorities and schedules to keep that passion from being obscured. Memorize Matthew 6:33.

2. In a compassionate plea, Christ invited the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30). A. W. Tozer commented, "The testimony of the true follower of Christ might well be something like this: The world's pleasures and the world's treasures henceforth have no appeal for me. I reckon myself crucified to the world and the world crucified to me. But the multitudes that were so dear to Christ shall not be less dear to me. If I cannot prevent their moral suicide, I shall at least baptize them with my human tears. I want no blessing that I cannot share. I seek no spirituality that I must win at the cost of forgetting that men and women are lost and without hope. If in spite of all I can do they will sin against light and bring upon themselves the displeasure of a holy God, then I must not let them go their sad way unwept. I scorn a happiness that I must purchase with ignorance. I reject a heaven I must enter by shutting my eyes to the sufferings of my fellow men. I choose a broken heart rather than any happiness that ignores the tragedy of human life and human death. Though I, through the grace of God in Christ, no longer lie under Adam's sin, I would still feel a bond of compassion for all of Adam's tragic race, and I am determined that I shall go down to the grave [and] up into God's heaven mourning for the lost and perishing" (Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer, Harry Verploegh, ed. [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1988], p. 196). Pray for the Lord to give that kind of compassion for the lost.

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