

Passion for the Lost

Luke 19:1-10

Intro

What is passion? Passion is defined as an intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction. Everything great in life, everything worthwhile, everything significant, everything impactful is the result of someone's undeniable and unstoppable passion. The things that mark history as unique events are the result of people who have a deep and consuming desire to see something come to fruition.

If Christianity is to impact the world, it must be carried by people who have a passion to see it reach the ends of the earth. There must be a certain passion involved in Christian evangelism. But because we live in an age which literally overwhelms us, which overpowers us, which dominates our thinking, the age in which we live tends to dull our sharpness. It tends to blunt our commitment. It tends to obscure the reality of what is a genuinely legitimate goal and what is an illegitimate involvement in nothing more than trivia. We live in an age that robs our faith of its dynamic power.

There are Christians today that sort of are a cold bath for every fiery heart. In fact, when we meet someone with passion who is concerned about some spiritual enterprise, we don't understand that because that is not the norm. The norm is to sort of have your Christianity fit in somewhere so it doesn't disrupt your life style, or it doesn't create discomfort for you. It doesn't break into your leisure and recreational life.

Many in Christianity today have a big brain but a very small heart. And the Christian's temperature has dropped. The church seems sterile and believers tend to be spiritual indifferent and apathetic. Christians are treating the world as a playground and not as a harvest field.

General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once said that his desire, had it been possible, would be to dangle his evangelism trainees over hell for 24 hours. That way, they could see the reality that awaits those who do not know Jesus Christ.

David Brainerd, missionary to American Indians, shared his heart cry in his diary: "I set apart this day for fasting and prayer to prepare me for the ministry. In the forenoon, I felt a power of intercession for immortal souls. In the afternoon God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that I was quite wet with sweat, though in the shade and the cool wind. My soul was drawn out very much for the world: I gasped for multitudes of souls. I think I had more enlargement for sinners than for the children of God, though I felt as if I could spend my life in cries for both (April 19, 1742)."

Two years later Brainerd wrote in his diary, "I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through so that I could but gain souls to Christ. I continued in this frame all evening and night. While I was asleep, I dreamed of these things, and when I waked, the first thing I thought of was this great work of pleading for God against Satan" (July 21, 1744).

David Brainerd had a tremendous passion for the lost.

Insular Christians

Also many Christians have become insular and keep to themselves or their clique. We have created a culture of "an exclusive community" that we have no more time for relationships with people who aren't in our immediate social circle.

What would it take for you to have time to spend with your classmates, neighbours, and co-workers, on their turf?

Monastic Movement

Throughout church history there have been religious believers who have segregated themselves from what they called the pagan world. The monastic movement had a great effect on Christianity. Monks, hermits, and nuns became secluded in monasteries where they separated themselves from the world and devoted themselves to the ascetic life, a life of prayer, meditation and good works. Most of these religious folk did not connect much with the outside world. That kind of thinking influenced the church and many did not engage with the lost world.

Paul Harvey said, "*Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium.*"

Bill Bright, Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, said, "*Millions of surveys which we have helped to take around the world indicate that approximately 98 percent of the Christians do not regularly introduce others to the Saviour.*"

With so few believers actively sharing their faith, we must get back to the heart of Christ's mission and passion so that the Church can be the voice of truth to those who are lost. The encounter of Zacchaeus and Jesus teaches us what we must do to reach people for Christ.

Jesus had a passion for the lost. He often hung out with sinners, and those despised by the religious establishment.

Mark 2:13-17, "*Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Religious people had a hard time with this, but Jesus was firm in his calling. As He says, "*The healthy don't need a doctor, but the sick do.*" Jesus wanted to be around "sinners."

The coolest thing is that Jesus didn't go just to preach and teach. He went in to love, and live among them, living a life that stood in direct contrast to their ways, and never He never compromised.

Sinners were drawn to Jesus. They saw something different in Him - that He loved them and hung around them. And after they were exposed to that kind of love, it changed them.

I'm not sure my life would attract that many "sinners." Maybe it would if I was around more "sinners." I guess what I'm saying is, we need to evaluate our "saltiness." We are to be salt and light in this dark world.

The Story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Zacchaeus: His name in Hebrew means *pure*

-I think there was a lot of fun in Jericho when he was called by his name.

-They would say: "Hello, Pure!"

-What a name for a tax collector! Quite the opposite!

-He was a chief tax collector, the head of the local taxation department.

-He would employ others to work under him.

-As a leader of tax collectors he was filthy rich.

- As a tax collector he was ostracized by the religious community.
- Zach had no access to the temple.
- He was hated in his community and had little social life.

Religious Attitude and Mindset

- He was hated and despised by the people.
- This guy was a hopeless case and nobody bothered with him.
- The religious leaders ignored him and passed judgment on him.
- They wanted nothing to do with him and most likely were glad that he was going to hell.

About Zacchaeus' life

- But Zach was not pleased with his life.
- All the wealth he had could not satisfy his heart.
- He desired a new start on life but didn't know how it could happen.
- From the account of the story we gather that he wanted God to be merciful to him.
- His only hope was Christ.
- His heart was ready and willing.
- Zach probably prayed for God to do something with his miserable life.

Luke 19:3

- He was short and couldn't see Jesus so he climbed a tree.
- He wanted to see Jesus but there were obstacles.
- There are obstacles that prevent people from seeing Christ; like disbelief, materialism, greed for wealth, immoral lifestyle etc.
- Jesus did not pass him by but called out his name.
- Jesus did not say, 'I would like to stay at your house', but *I must stay at your home* (Luke 19:5). This is indicating that Zach was seeking and desired to know the Lord.
- Jesus saw his visit with Zach as a divine encounter, it was His divine mission.
- It is interesting that the Lord did not stop in the house of a predominate illustrious person nor in a home of a reputable religious person.
- Our Lord decided to have a meal in the home of a low down sinner despised by society.
- Zach quickly climbed down the tree and received Jesus joyfully!

The Crowd Disapproved

- The people complained about it.
- First they condemned Zach as a sinner. He is not worthy of such a visit.
- Second they criticized Jesus for being the guest of such a man.
- But Zach stood and proceeded to give striking evidence of what Jesus' visit would do for him by announcing the restitution he was about to do.

Those he cheated:

- If a widow could not pay her taxes he probably would put her out of her house and take possession of it.
- If a man could not pay enough taxes, Zach would take a mortgage on the home.
- This was a common practice in those days. That's why they were hated because people knew they were money grabbers and thieves.
- Zach makes a public confession and he truly repents.

-He promises to give half of the goods back AND restore fourfold to those whom he had falsely taxed.

* Notice that Zach uses the present tense in his confession and resolve.

Luke 19:8, *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."*

In Numbers 5:7 we read, *"The person... must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged."*

The law required 20% to pay back those one has wronged.

BUT Zach gives back 80%. He goes beyond the law and gives from the heart.

-This is true repentance. It is a change of conduct and making restitution.

-Faith and works go hand in hand. *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* (James 2:14, 17).

Jesus sought Zach who was certainly among the lost. But Jesus did not leave him there; He changed him and saved him!

Personal Illustration

My experience in São Miguel... (April, 2016)

Conclusion

Zach was hated, despised and rejected by society and worse, by the religious community. He was neglected spiritually, a lost soul whom no one cared for.

But our Lord cared and saw him in a different way – He felt passion, compassion and love for him and he did something about it. He went to have a meal with him – a personal visit in order to save his precious soul.

We need to see people the way Jesus sees them. We need to have a passion for the lost and feel love for them as Christ feels love and compassion.

We need to seek opportunities where we can connect with those who don't know Christ.

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD!

*We too must follow Christ's example on how he saw the lost. We must go to the lost and rejected and share with them the love of God and His plan for their salvation!

The world has always been turned by the passionate people. John Stuart Blackie said many years ago, and I quote him: "The early church worked by a fervent moral contagion, not by the persuasion of a cool argument. The Christian method of conversion, not by logical arguments but by moral contagion and the power of the Holy Spirit, has with the masses of mankind always proved itself the most effective."

I pray that God would stir a passion in your heart for the lost.