

“A Passion-Driven Church”

Hebrews 12: 18-29

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom, and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling in fear.”

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 The words, “One more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our “God is a consuming fire.”

Prayer Before the Sermon: Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Word to us so that we might learn about You. You teach us through the Holy Scriptures and You reach our hearts and consciences through the Holy Spirit. You walk beside us each day, teaching us and leading us in the paths You want us to follow. Help us to not wander from Your side. Keep us close to You and continue to guide us. Help us to keep Your Words in our hearts and minds so that we may always live Your way. Protects us and guide us. Fill us with Your peace and love. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that through Your Son, we may join You in Your heavenly Kingdom. AMEN

What’s your passion? Has anyone ever asked you that? Have you ever asked anyone else that? The way you answer that questions has the potential to reveal more about who you are than any other question.

Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet writes, “My mother’s passion was God. She loved talking to God. Many were the times mother would roll out of bed, or get up from her knees, or sit up from her chair and announce to my brother and me: “God has told me this: ...” As a young child Pastor Sweet was in awe of his mother for actually having talked with God. As a teenager he decided that his mom’s talks with God were all in her head. Then

as an adult, Pastor Sweet finally figured out something. Whenever his mother would tell what God had told her, she would quote the words of Scripture. That's it! Sweet's mother did hear God speak. The Spirit bore witness with her spirit and pointed her to the words of Scripture that she needed to hear this was God's way of addressing Mama Sweet. **[NOTE 1]**

No wonder she had such a passion. Now wonder Pastor Sweet's mother was on fire for God. No wonder she was able to forget everything "except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (the words of 1 Corinthians 2:2).

God is talking to you all the time. Are you listening? Do you hear God speak? Could our failure to hear God speak explain why there's not a significant amount of passion in our churches anymore or even in our personal lives?

People are passionate about a lot of things. Brian Caise and John Leep are passionate about fishing. I am passionate about deer hunting, the Packers, and playing guitar, Seth is passionate about singing, some others are passionate about cooking or baking, others are passionate about sewing or knitting. Kathy and Kamela are passionate about horses. But the million dollar question this morning is, "Are you passionate about God??!" Christians ... are supposed to be people who are passionate about Jesus and passionate about God and the Holy Spirit. A man named Richard Webb calls this "caught-up-ness" in God's flow." Failure is nothing more or less than, getting out of God's flow." Success is nothing more or less than being in "God's flow." To be a disciple of Jesus is to have a "passion for the Passion" of Christ. **[NOTE 2]**

A Passion for the passion" is a phrase of the Episcopal priest and writer Robert Farrar Capon. Capon defines "passion for the Passion" as the passion of the believer's heart for Jesus Himself—a "wild romance with the Person of the incarnate Word who reigns in death at the roots of the being of every person—bar none." We refer to the series of events leading up to Jesus giving His life for us on the cross, as the Passion."

A passion of the believer's soul for what Jesus does, standing caution on its head and taking all the riffraff of the world home free by making the one ticket everybody has the only ticket anybody needs. This "passion for The Passion" is a bright fire in the believer's belly—for the sheer fun of shocking the troops awake with the astonishing news that God has torn up His membership card in the God Union, that He has stopped counting the worlds trespasses, and that to be raised up into the new creation, we don't need to be good, holy, smart, accountable, or even faithful: we need only be dead and claiming the blood of Jesus. All we have to do, is accept and receive what has already been given to us by God! Let Him into your heart, and you can know you have eternal life.

Rick Warren is the senior minister of one of the largest churches in America: Saddleback Church in Mission Viejo, California. Rick has written several books that many leadership teams, churches, people and pastors have read and re-read. The first one came out in 1995 entitled "The Purpose Driven Church" which was followed up in 2002 with "The Purpose Driven Life". The Purpose Driven Church has sold over a million copies and over 50 million copies of the Purpose Driven Life have been sold.

The Purpose Driven Church is the best handbook on the market for how to reach people for Jesus. The Purpose Driven Life is one of the best books ever on living your life for Jesus, letting the purpose of following Jesus be your purpose. [NOTE 3] Our Scripture reading for today from Hebrews chapter 12 is about a “passion-driven church, a church that lives and moves and has its being out of its passion for Christ’s Passion. What has happened to our passion? Why is the mainline church dying? Because, as a whole, the mainline churches have lost their passion for living Jesus’ way. All the mainline denominations are declining. Having a passion for following Jesus and living His way is the key to a growing church! Without a passion for God and His Word, church just isn’t important enough. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are just acquaintances. If we are truly living out what we read in this book we will be blood brothers and blood sisters. It is so easy to drift from a close family atmosphere to where everybody watches out for and holds one another accountable ...to a social club where we talk nice to one another when we happen to be in close proximity and then walk away not to think about that person again until the following Sunday. It is so easy to get to the place where we show up to church to check the box so we can say we are a “good” person. Some of us don’t even think of Jesus during the week, much less the people we go to church with.

Many years ago now, I watched a movie, it first came out back in 1998, some of you weren’t even born yet. It is essentially about a man who is passionate about being a rancher and more importantly has a passion for horses. At one point the character played by Robert Redford, tells about his previous marriage. He talks about how passionate they were for one another. How his ex-wife was passionate about cello music and how he shared that passion. The woman listening to him says something about right and wrong and he replies by saying, “I didn’t love her because it was right, I just loved her.” We don’t have passion in our churches, we don’t love Jesus, because it is the right thing to do or to avoid hell. Somehow, we have to get back to loving Jesus because He first loved us and love Him out of a burning passion in our souls. [NOTE 4]

Listen to this idea from a book by Charlotte Sophia Kask: One of my favorite phrases is “God is love, lover, and Beloved. If we break “Beloved” in two, we have “be loved”: Be loved by the Spirit, be loved by yourself, be loved by others. If we remove the last letter of “Beloved” we have “be love.” Don’t seek love or a lover, simply BE LOVE. Be at peace with all that is, and know that you are God’s beloved.

When we can do this, even for a few moments, we will feel a flow of energy like the current of a river dissolving our separateness and bringing unity. It is God’s flow, the flow that we talked about earlier. Author and Pastor J.I. Packer wrote a book entitled, “Keep in Step with the Spirit.” If we don’t keep in step we fall away, we fall behind, we are out of step, out of sync and we backslide.

This is a passage for weary Christians. The message cries out to those who have experienced faith in Christ but have backed off for one reason or another. The author of Hebrews wants to encourage us Christ-followers. In Hebrews chapter 12 the author reaches back to a familiar technique in Jewish writings: the argument from lesser to greater. If something is true in a lesser case, then obviously it is true in the greater. On

Mount Sinai, when the Law was giving, Moses himself stood in fear and trembling before God. If the giving of the Law filled Moses with awe, shouldn't the Good News of Christ fill us with an even greater awe and excitement? [NOTE 5]

Previously in the book of Hebrews we find warnings to be careful to not "drift away" in chapter 2, not to develop an "unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" in Chapter 3, not to become "sluggish" in chapter 6, or to not "neglect meeting together" in chapter 10 as some were evidently doing. As it was during the first century, so it is today. We need the same wake-up call to avoid taking our faith for granted and slipping into a kind of spiritual sleepiness or laziness. The question is: How do we rekindle a waning passion? Following the example of Hebrews, we too, need to be reminded of the glory of the Christian life. We are actors in the greatest story ever told and we need to see fresh examples of the difference faith makes and the accompanying joy.

[NOTE 6] The sluggish/tired Christian walk can be recharged only through reconnecting with the living Christ. Christians through the ages have used many different means to stimulate life: prayer, Scripture, worship, retreats, revivals, service, etc. etc. I can point to events that recharged my spiritual life in the past like the Promise Keepers stadium events. I heard testimony after testimony of how these events made a significant impact on a man's life. I have also been recharged by special worship services, a leadership conference, by good concerts. There are always concrete opportunities for service, retreat, or growth that can help Christ-followers to renew their passion. However, remember that redeveloping spiritual passion comes not through means, but through a real **re-discovery of Christ**. I pray that we can make it a priority to put ourselves in situations where we can experience the power of the Holy Spirit and be wary of taking the riches of faith for granted. IF we always stay home and just attend the minimum church requirements ... then I can guarantee that we will not grow. If it even crosses your mind, "am I doing enough?" then it is highly probably that you will not grow or be able to maintain a passion for the Passion.

The writer of Hebrews was burnt-up with the passion of God. He burned up the pages of the Bible with his Passion for The Passion. Everyone who has made a difference in someone's life for God has done so by being burned-up with passion. St. John of the Cross, after he escaped from prison wrote this: There in the lucky dark, none to observe me, darkness far and wide; no sign for me to mark, no other light, no guide except for my heat – the fire, the fire inside!

Is there a fire inside your soul? Is the Passion of Christ the things that gives your soul light? Is Jesus what makes your soul leap for joy? Is Jesus the source of your liveliness, your lovingness, and your livingness? [NOTE 7]

God fights fire with fire. In the midst of a world ablaze in sin and suffering, God sends forth people on fire. Those who have been touched from on high by the fires of the Almighty ought to be fired-up. Are you? Will we open our hearts this morning to having a passion for "the Passion"? Will you be a passion-driven disciple? Look for things that you can take part in that will spark or reignite your passion. I believe some

hearts were rekindled in the last weeks. Maybe there is an event that can help rekindle our passion for following Jesus. Maybe it's a book like "The Purpose Driven Life" or "Radical" by David Platt, or "Crazy Love" by Francis Chan that will rekindle the fire within you. Maybe God will use a worship experience at Doster Church. We have to choose to put ourselves in places or situations where God can easily rekindle the flame of our souls. Like we sang in the beginning of the service today, Feed the Fire. Can Doster Community Church, a family of fellow Christ-followers become a passion-driven church? Not on our own power, that's for sure! I believe God is calling us to become a passion-driven church. If it is to happen, we must read and re-read passages in Scripture, yay even memorize passages like Titus 2:14, Romans 12:11, Hebrews 12: 18-29. Then we must pray for it. We must associate and spend time with passionate people and intentionally do things in line with our spiritual gifts, with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we don't do that then becoming a passion-driven church is just a pipe dream. A nice thought.

In a marriage that has become dull and lifeless, when a married couple become basically house mates or roommates, some experts counsel them to do the things they did when they were first dating and getting to know each other. To rekindle your first love for Jesus, think of a time when you really felt passionate about learning about and getting to know Jesus Christ. Then do some of the same things, activities, read some of the same things, you did back then. Ask the Lord to rekindle the passion within you. Now there is a prayer that God would love to answer. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “A Passion-Driven Church”
based on Hebrews 12: 18-29 given in Doster Community Church
on April 30, 2023

- I. 1 Corinthians 2:2 “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” God is talking to you all the time. Are you listening?
- II. Are we passionate about God? To be a disciple of Jesus is to have a passion for “The Passion” of Christ. “The Passion” refers to the events of the last week of Jesus’ life that led to His crucifixion, death, and resurrection.
- III. A “Passion-driven Church” is a church that lives and moves and has its being out of its passion for Christ’s “Passion”. What has happened to our passion? A passion for following Jesus and living His way is the key to growing our church!
- IV. Don’t seek love, be love. Know that you are God’s beloved! If we don’t keep in step with the Holy Spirit we will fall away, fall behind, get out of sync, and ultimately backslide.
- V. Previously in Hebrews we find warnings to “not drift away” (ch.2), not to develop an “unbelieving heart that turns away” (ch.3), not to become “sluggish”(ch.6) and “do not neglect meeting together” (ch.10). Leads us to the question, “How do we rekindle a waning passion?”.
- VI. We need to reconnect with the living Christ. Seek ways to recharge/rekindle your passion for Jesus and what He has done for you. We need to put ourselves in situations where we can experience the power of the Holy Spirit. Find a way to rekindle your passion for Jesus!
- VII. What are you going to do about it? Please write something down on paper today, that you will do this week to reignite your passion for Jesus and what He has done for you _____.