

## EXALT - REIGNING YOUR PASSION FOR GOD

Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris in 1919 after the First World War for the Paris Peace Talks. He took with him some of his Arabian friends. One day he took them to see the sights of the city. His friends showed little interest in the Louvre, the Arch of Triumph, or Napoleon's tomb. The thing that really interested them was the faucet in their bathtub. They spent much time turning it on and off; they thought it was wonderful. All they had to do was turn the handle and they could get all the water they wanted. When they were leaving Paris, Lawrence found them in the bathroom with wrenches, trying to get the faucet off so they could take it with them. You see, they said, it is very dry in Arabia. What we need are faucets. If we have them, we will have all the water we want. Lawrence had to explain to them that the effectiveness of the faucet depended on the water system to which it was attached. Faucets do not make the water, just deliver it. And so it is with worship. Our focus on Sunday mornings is not the mode of worship, the instruments that are played or the songs that are sung. What is important is the One we worship.

Today we are kicking off the fall with a series looking at our missions statement. It says, To exalt God, embrace one-another, equip for service and extend God's kingdom. These 4 things are our focus. Our church mission statement comes from the two 'great' statements of the New Testament – the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Today I want us to look at the Great Commandment, that we exist as individuals and as a church to worship.

Mark 12:28-33 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 The most important one, answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." 32 Well said, teacher, the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

We ended our series looking at the 7 churches of Revelation two weeks ago with Laodicea. It talked about being lukewarm. That is when you coast, when you are neither hot or cold but adapt to room temperature. God wants us to be passionate about him, and passion requires effort and energy.

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Let me ask you this morning, what are you passionate about? If you go to Amazon and type in the word passion there are hundreds of books. There are books like A Passion for Books, A Passion for Birds, A Passion for Fashion, A Passion for Gardening, A Passion for Fishing (which is understandable), A Passion for Chocolate (now I have your attention...) All kinds of things.

In our culture it seems like it is OK to be passionate about everything but Jesus. You go to a sports event and you can yell your head off. If you are passionate about a sports team you are a fan, but if you are passionate about Jesus, you are a fanatic.

Are you passionate about God? Was that passion for God seen in your worship this morning? There are many things that can kill passion in our lives. Let me give you 5 of them;

## 1. An Unconfessed Sin

There are few things in life that rob us of joy, confidence and passion more quickly than guilt. God understands this, which is why He takes sin so seriously. Sin is a problem for Christians not because it decreases our salvation but because it distances us from our Saviour. On the cross Jesus paid for our sins. When we sin, the problem is that it makes us run from God.

Genesis 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Sin brought shame and guilt into the lives of Adam and Eve. It caused them to hide from God. And it causes us to do the same thing today. We cannot feel enthusiasm and guilt at the same time. You can't feel shame and passion at the same time because guilt by its very definition robs you of passion.

Psalms 38:4-5 My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. 5 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.

Look at these words; overwhelmed, burden, wound, loathsome... do these sound like joyful and uplifting things? Does this sound like a good day for you?

Mark talked last week about his daughter going camping. Maybe you have heard me tell before the story of canoeing in Killarney Provincial Park. I had to go through a long portage, so I took my heavy backpack and canoe and started walking. Every mosquito in Canada attacked me. It was almost impossible to walk, let alone run. Living with guilt in your life is a lot like that. We carry around so much baggage that it robs us of joy and slows our growth in Christ.

Thousands of Christians are like water-logged vessels, they cannot sink; yet, they are saturated with so many inconsistencies, worldliness and little permitted evils that they can only be towed with difficulty into the celestial port -- F.B. Meyer

God never intended us to live the Christian life under the weight of guilt. He made us to deal with it immediately. He sent Jesus to this earth to die on a cross to say, I want to offer you a gift -- freedom from guilt. That is God's gift. Some of you today may feel like you are carrying such a burden. Lay it down. You can do that right now. Just give it to Jesus.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

That is a promise. To confess just means you agree with God. You just say, "God, I agree with You that what I did was wrong. Forgive me. I want to live the kind of way You want me to live." Don't wait. Do it now. As we head into the fall make sure you throw off anything that would hinder you from the race God has marked out before you.

Someone once said that a church that has passion is a church where "Discouraged folks cheer up, dishonest folks fees up, sour folks sweeten up, closed folk open up, gossipers shut up, conflicted folks make up, sleeping folks wake up, lukewarm folk fire up and pew potatoes stand up! But most of all, Christ our Savior is lifted up."

## 2. An Unresolved Conflict

Conflict drains the passion right out of you. Do you ever wake up in the morning thinking “this is going to be a great day!” You sing in the shower, you brush your teeth, you get dressed and eat breakfast. You are on your way out the door, the sun is shining and the birds are singing. Then suddenly you have a fight with your spouse or kids. It takes the wind out of your sails. It takes the spring out of your steps. By the time you get to the car you are dragging your feet and dreading the day before you. That is what conflict does.

Let’s be honest about this. Some of you are in situations at home or at work where the conflict is constant. Maybe you are doing all that you can to minimize the conflict but it is coming from the other person. How do you keep your passion in a situation like that?

You have to protect yourself. You cannot control what other people do, but you can control your own actions and emotions. There are three emotions that kill our passion quickly, they are resentment, jealousy and prolonged anger.

Job 5:2 Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.

Job 18:4 You who tear yourself to pieces in your anger, is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? Or must the rocks be moved from their place?

Resentment, jealousy and anger are passion killing emotions. Notice it talks about those who “tear yourself to pieces”. Anger only hurts you.

To renew your passion for worship, you need to deal with the conflict. That means that you have to let it go. You have to make the decision to forgive. It has been said that unforgiveness is like punching yourself and expecting the other person to bleed. That makes no sense. It only hurts you. If you are harbouring bitterness in your heart than you need to let it go.

Maybe you are thinking, I can’t forgive them. I can’t ‘Let them off the hook’? They are not the one on the hook, you are. It is not about letting people off the hook but giving them to God. You take them off your hook and place them in God’s hands. If you do not do this then unforgiveness is going to kill the passion in your life the rest of your life. Don’t allow the actions and opinions of other people to control your life.

I recently saw the movie The Shack. I know that there are lots of people that have problems with that book. You may question the theology, but I felt the way it handled the topic of unforgiveness was right on. You cannot move forward with God without letting go of the past.

### 3. An Unbalanced Schedule

That means that if you are overworked or that you are under worked that you are likely to lose your passion for living and lose your passion for God. Life is about balance. It has seasons. The Bible says that there is a season for everything. There is a rhythm to life. You need both input and output. You need both rest and work. Too much of either will cause you to lose your passion. Too much work and you have burnout, too little and you have boredom. Neither are good.

My guess is that in a crowd this size, there are those who need to work less and those who need to work more. We tend to be one extreme or the other. Some of you are involved in too much. You are always giving. You’re always helping, sharing, serving. You never take time to recharge.

Psalms 127:2 (MSG) It's useless to rise early and go to bed late, and work your worried fingers to the bone. Don't you know he enjoys giving rest to those he loves?

If you never take time to recharge you are unbalanced on the ministry side. Eventually you are going to get compassion fatigue. That is when you just stop caring. You stop caring about God and about people and about anything. It is called burn out. When you care and care and care, eventually you get this compassion fatigue.

Others of you here are the exact opposite. You are always taking in but never giving out. You go to church and Bible studies, you listen to teachers on the radio, you read books, you go to seminars and workshops. You are always learning but never giving. You don't have any ministry. The result is unbalance. If you eat without exercising, it is not good for you.

James 2:17 (MSG) Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

God holds you accountable for what you know. This is why we need both input and output. You need work and you need rest. You need balance in your schedule. Make sure you are making the time to serve but then make sure you are taking the time to recharge.

During a recent Sunday worship service, a congregation was singing the worship chorus that goes: "I exalt thee, oh Lord..." A mother of a 5-year-old girl glanced down and realized that her daughter was fervently singing, "I'm exhausted, I'm exhausted, I'm exhausted Oh Lord ..."

#### 4. An Unused Talent

God has blessed each one of us certain gifts and abilities. If we do not use our gifts and talents the result will be a loss of passion for life and loss of passion for God.

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

God gives us gifts to use in the body. They are given not for your benefit but for the benefit of others. If you don't use your talents you will lose your passion because you are not living your life the way God created you to live it.

Many people work at jobs that do little to fire their passion. There are studies that have shown that over 70% of people are in a job that does not use their talents. They are doing it just to put food on the table. That is why serving is so important. When you find a place to serve that uses your gifts and fuels your passion it energizes you. That place of service is your ministry. Last week we looked at this verse;

Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

God has given different gifts to different people. We were all created for a purpose. God made each one of us to accomplish a different task. If you want to know your purpose, understand your gifts.

No one builds a refrigerator and then sits down to figure out what it will be used for. You start with the function, you design the object to meet its function (keeping things cold) and then build the object according to that design.

God want you to understand your gifts and use them. When you do that you experience passion. Gifts can be used or abused. You have heard me say this before, but it is possible to hammer a nail into a wall using an alarm clock. You can do it, but it is not easy and very hard on the alarm clock. There are people here that are trying to live their lives like that. God mad you an alarm clock, but you are trying to be a hammer. The result is frustration.

When you use your life for the function that God intended it brings joy to you and glory to God. E.g. stick for putting up lights.

Worship is rooted in a deep understanding of God's truth about who you are and about who He is. It is not just about feeling, but about truth and purpose.

There was a woman who went on a short term missions trip to Kenya. During her time there she stopped at a remote village where she attended a medical clinic. As the native women outside the clinic began to sing together, she found herself deeply moved by their beautiful singing. The harmonies and rhythms seemed worshipful indeed. She was so moved she began to cry. Since she wanted to capture the moment in her memories, she turned to her bi-lingual friend and queried, "Could you please translate the words to that absolutely beautiful song?" Her friend stared at her and respectfully replied, "These women are saying that if you boil the water, you won't get dysentery." Worship is more than a feeling or experience. It involves an understanding of the truth.

## 5. An Unclear Purpose

God created us the way we are for a purpose. When we loose sight of that purpose we loose our passion. If you don't know the purpose for life, why bother? Why get up in the morning? Why put forth the effort? Why get out of bed? Life without purpose is activity without direction. It's motion without meaning. Life without purpose is trivial, petty, and pointless.

Isaiah 49:4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing..."

Have you ever felt like that? How does God respond to these words of Israel? He reminds them of their purpose. He reminds them that they were called to be a light to the nations. That people everywhere would be blessed and saved through them.

Maybe you are here this morning and you are thinking the same thing. You are asking yourself "What's the point? I've tried serving before and it just did not work out." I want to remind you again this morning that passion and purpose go together. If all you are living for is yourself or even your family, that is not enough. You need a cause greater than yourself. That gives life significance and gives life meaning.

Passion is waking up in the morning, whoever you are, wherever you are, however old or young, and bounding out of bed because there's something out there you love to do, that you believe in, that you're good at – something that's bigger than you are, and you can hardly wait to get at it again today.  
-- Whit Hobbs

That is passion. It's something that you'd rather be doing than anything else and you wouldn't give it up for money because it means more to you than money.

In the coming weeks we are going to be talking about purpose. God created us to exalt Him, to live in community by embracing one another, to equip ourselves for service and to find our ministry and extend His kingdom.

As we come to the communion table this morning, we remember that God was so passionate about you that Jesus came and went to the cross in your place. For God so loved the world that He sent His only son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

A man and a woman meet each other for the first time and instantaneously a spark of interest is ignited. They begin meeting once a week for dinner. But that isn't enough. Their growing interest in one another demands more contact. As a result their telephone bill soars. They far surpass the maximum minutes allowed on their cell phones and the bills move from \$40 a month to \$300 a month. What happened? Did they suddenly fall in love with the idea of telephoning? Did they develop a passion for the cell phone? No, they developed a passion for each other. They used the cell phone as their tool for feeding, maintaining, and developing their passion for one another. No one talked them into their using their phones more, or explained to them the benefits of phone usage. It was their passion for each other that drove them, not their passion for the phone.

And so it is with worship. It is not about the mode of worship, but the One you are worshipping. As we come to the communion table today, it is not about the bread and the juice. They are symbols of something deeper. It is not about the song we are going to sing or about the instruments used to play it. It is about Jesus. It is about God's great love, His passion for you. Do you have that same passion for Him?

Isaac Watts wrote fifty-two books, twenty-nine of them on theology. But he is best remembered for his hymns. He wrote more than seven hundred, and even today the average modern hymnal will have twenty or more of his songs--276 years after they were written. When he died he was reciting one of his favorites: "I'll Praise My Maker While I Breathe."

A.W. Tozer: What is worship? Worship is to feel in your heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that Majesty which philosophers call the First Cause, but which we call Our Father Which Are in Heaven.

But how about this definition of sound worship by William Temple: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

I was looking at the order of worship in a bulletin for another church recently when I noticed a spelling mistake. After the sermon, they had listed that they would have an "Alter Call." That's a mistake because the front of a church is referred to as an "altar." Then I thought for a moment about it and started to wonder if they'd accidentally stumbled onto something. After all, when we come forward to pray at the end of the service, we are usually asking God to "alter" us – shape me, change me, help me to be the person you want me to be. They didn't have it right grammatically, but maybe they were closer to right spiritually than I originally gave them credit for. Do I want God to alter me? Do I want to be changed into His likeness? Or am I pursuing a God who will help me in my moment of crisis, but who I don't want asking me to make any changes in my life?

"The best public worship is that which produces the best private Christianity." (J. C. Ryle)

C.S. Lewis said that when he first became a Christian, he had trouble with church gatherings. "I thought that I could do it on my own by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn't go to churches anymore." He found the sermons often dull, and he disliked organ music, which he described as "one long roar." He had contempt for church hymns, which he "considered to be fifth rate poems set to sixth rate music." As his faith matured, however, he grew to value gathering with other Christians to worship. As his ego diminished, he realized that these hymns were being sung with enthusiasm by elderly saints in neighboring pews, and then he realized that he was unworthy to clean their boots. He said, "Going to church gets you out of your solitary conceit." A secret: this is the main problem; conceit, ego, and pride

William Booth once had an audience with King Edward VII of England. His Majesty highly commended the salvationist for his unflagging zeal and wonderful work among the poor. How revealing was Booth's reply to the King's glowing words! He said, "Your Majesty, some men's passion is for art. Some men's passion is for fame. My passion is for souls."

What am I passionate about? Gardening, sewing, housekeeping, music, good food, socializing, art, cars? What about the lost who are bound for hell? Are you moved at all when you consider their plight? Our God was. Just look at the life, death and resurrection so that sinners could be saved.