

## + 1 Timothy 1:12-17 + Love Speaks Passionately + 17th Sunday after Pentecost + 15 September 2013 +

What are you passionate about? This time of year brings out some real passion among fans of college and professional football teams. In fact, the term “fan” is short for the word “fanatic”. So when you turn the TV on to the game and you see people with their faces or even half their body painted with the team colors, you can probably guess what their passion is.

Everyone is passionate about something. For some, it’s movies or a series of movies like Star Wars or Lord of the Rings or Star Trek. For others, it’s hobbies like hunting or camping or woodworking or cross-stitching or couponing. For some, they’re passionate about traveling or about the place they live or where they went to school. We aren’t surprised to find people very passionate about different causes or politics. Whatever people are passionate about, they can’t help talking about it or thinking about it. They readily spend their time, money, and energy on it. They’re passionate.

So what are you passionate about? Are you passionate about Jesus? Expressing it that way might sound a little odd to your ears and mine. People in our circles have a tendency to hesitate being “passionate” about Jesus, but do we really have any good reason to not be passionate about Christ? To be honest, at least on the outside, many of us don’t seem passionate about Jesus at all, or at least that passion is quite subdued.

Now why is that? Why are we so hesitant to be passionate about Jesus? Perhaps for you, it’s the fear of rejection. You have loved ones. You have friends. You have co-workers or classmates or neighbors, who don’t seem all that open to hearing about Jesus from you. Perhaps you’ve received some pushback in the past. So you hesitate to be passionate about Jesus.

Perhaps it’s uncertainty—not uncertainty in your Savior, but uncertainty in how you should talk about him. What if someone asks you a question you can’t answer? What if they throw out an objection and you freeze up? What if the words come stumbling out of your lips? What if you don’t say “just the right thing” about Jesus? So you hesitate to be passionate about Jesus.

Perhaps you feel uncomfortable or even embarrassed about the fact that you follow Christ. That does happen to Christians at times. Sometimes the pressure or the perceived pressure makes it hard to be passionate about Jesus when you’re with family or friends or co-workers or classmates. You wonder how people would look at you differently if they knew you were a follower of Christ. So you hesitate to be passionate about Jesus.

Now those are real concerns that give you cause for pause, but compared to how passionate we are about so many other things and teams and causes that in the end don’t matter eternally, isn’t it embarrassing to consider how passionate we really aren’t about Jesus? What does that say about your devotion to the Savior and mine? Is it perhaps a glimpse at the sad reality of how we truly feel about Christ?

Well, this morning in 1 Timothy 1, we meet someone who was truly passionate about Christ Jesus. You could almost say that the Apostle Paul was “**obsessed**” with his Savior—in a good way. Here you have a man who was willing to endure beatings and floggings, imprisonment and shipwrecks and verbal attacks, and even once had stones thrown at him until they thought he was dead. He was willing to endure hunger and pain, need and hardship. Why endure all that? He did it all for the sake of Christ.

Why would Paul be so passionate about Christ Jesus? Recall what Paul had once been, when he was better known as Saul. Paul himself tells us that he “**was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man**” who “**acted out of ignorance in unbelief**”. When he was still Saul, Paul was so hell-bent on wiping the name of Jesus off the face of the earth that it became an obsession. Once while he was making a defense before a king named Agrippa, Paul explained what he once was. “**I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.**” (Acts 26:9-11 NIV84).

Paul had been a violent aggressor, who attacked Christians for following Jesus. He forced them to blaspheme the name of their Savior. He supported their death, yet he himself should’ve known better. He was a scholar of the highest degree in Old Testament studies, yet for all his studies of the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms, he missed the Savior. You would think he was the archenemy of Christ and his followers. “**But I received mercy...And the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.**” Christ turned Paul around. The Lord directed Paul’s great learning and energy and zeal to proclaiming

Christ rather than persecuting him. The Lord **“appointed Paul to the ministry”**, and that became Paul’s passion.

He became a faithful minister with a trustworthy message—a message that wasn’t all about him, but all about the One who had changed his life. Paul tells Timothy, **“This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them.”** Paul applied that trustworthy message to himself first before proclaiming and sharing it with everyone he met and knew.

Why would the Lord do such a thing? Why not just eliminate his archenemy? We heard earlier about Christ’s mercy and grace and love that he showed towards Paul—gifts that Paul certainly didn’t deserve as a persecutor of the Church, but there was another reason—a reason that the Savior was using for more souls to hear about his love. **“But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate His extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”** Many other people—all sinners, all unbelievers—would learn of the mercy Christ showed to Paul and find that Christ’s mercy was for them too. It’s no wonder Paul was so passionate!

Is there any reason you and I should not be just as passionate about Jesus? Recall what you were and what you’re like by nature. Deep down every one of us in our own way would have to admit, “Wait, Paul! I’m the worst!” For some, you can remember that time before you were called to faith in Christ through the Gospel. For others, you know those secret sins or that sin in the past that plagues you. For all of us, you know when you’ve fallen short of God’s holy will. You know when your words have blasphemed the God who loves you, when your actions have shown embarrassment or disregard for the Savior you follow, when your arrogance or your temper went on the offensive. You know what you were and what you’re like by nature—ignorant in unbelief. Can any of us honestly say, “I’m better than Paul!”?

**“But I received mercy...And the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”** Just like Paul, **“I received mercy”**. You **“received mercy”**. Our Lord’s grace overflowed on you and me, so that the trustworthy message is true for you and me. **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—even me.”**

To be passionate about something, you have to have a reason for being passionate. What greater reason do you and I have to be passionate about Jesus than that he came into the world to save sinners—even you and me?

Like Paul, we apply that message to ourselves first, but also realize that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy has given each of us the task of the ministry of the Gospel, of proclaiming that special, trustworthy message worthy of full acceptance. “Look what Christ Jesus did for me! If he shows mercy to a chief of sinners like me, then his mercy and grace are for you too.” You and I, as forgiven children of God washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism, now become examples like the Apostle Paul. Each of us can honestly say, **“But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might demonstrate His extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”**

If that’s what Jesus has done for you and me, why wouldn’t we be passionate about him? **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—even me.”** Why would we even think of hesitating to talk about Jesus or to devote our time, our energy, our money in his service to passionately share what Christ has given to us? **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—even me.”** Why wouldn’t you passionately want to speak that love of Christ with a loved one, a friend, a co-worker, a classmate, a neighbor who desperately needs what Christ Jesus has already given to you?

When you and I realize what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for you and me, how he came into the world to save sinners by giving up his life and taking on your guilt and mine, then being passionate about Jesus becomes much easier and makes much more sense.

That passion for Jesus and sharing the love of Jesus will then overflow with a life of praise for his overflowing grace, because **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—even you, even me.”** Such praise that flowed from the Apostle will then overflow in your thoughts and words and actions as love speaks passionately. **“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”**