

# Cultivating a Passion for Jesus

These are Jonathan Green's speaking notes from a message given at The Sanctuary Westminster on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007

## Defined by God's Presence

Tonight I want us to think about cultivating a passion for Jesus. From the very beginning, since this group first formed 18 months ago now, we have spoken continuously, in one way or another, about becoming a vessel for the presence of God here in the heart of our capital city. We have spoken about being a place where God feels comfortable 'being' amongst us, and where we are defined by God's presence in our lives.

Now I use the word 'cultivating' purposefully. We need to be intentional about our passion for Jesus, it needs to be protected and nurtured and focused and shaped.

Now, I don't know about you, but I yearn for God's presence in my life - that's what I'm living for. I am consumed with a passion for God and his glory, because as I look at the world around us and all of the issues we face, I know that it is God's presence and what it 'does to us' and to communities and in all kinds of situations that makes *all* the difference. I am consumed with a passion for God and his way of doing things **because** I know that as I live from that place I gradually become what I was intended to be and start to bring something different to the table. I bring an alternative solution to the world and I then begin to invite others to participate in that other agenda - an agenda for transformation and wholeness for all the creation.

I was watching a talk earlier about climate change that took place at a very high profile conference with some of the smartest and most significant people on the planet. This guy was speaking about some of the amazing innovations and positive signs of change happening around the globe, but he concluded that he was afraid that all of these good initiatives would not be enough to turn the tide! He didn't have any solution. What do we do? he asked. He didn't have an answer. Well, I think that at that point I would say - and not in a simplistic way I must add - 'and then God.'

You see, when we come to *our* limits we can often despair especially if we do not believe in anything beyond us apart from annihilation. But the Christian, the follower of Jesus, can say with confidence 'and then God'.

## **Finding answers outside the system that raised the questions**

Someone a lot smarter than I said that a solution to a problem will never come from the system that created that problem in the first instance, you need to look beyond the paradigm. Philosophy cannot answer the questions it raises... you need to move to other fields to find the answers. Humans cannot fix humanity... ultimately the seeds of sin and death, of going it alone and thinking we know best, must be dealt with by something or someone else. That is why God alone had to deal with sin and its effects.

God's presence makes all the difference! God's presence turns a desperate situation into a hopeful one. With God, possibilities abound. And developing a passion for Jesus brings new possibilities. Passion is about having an intense desire or enthusiasm for something... Would you say that describes you in relation to God? Do you have an intense desire and enthusiasm for God's presence and his ways in the world? (pause)

## **Losing passion**

Passion is often in short supply in our society. Many people are jaded and cynical... and yet if we let those attitudes set in then we are in trouble. If we let cynicism drive our decisions and shape our policies and our society then we are lost.

Perhaps we once had a passion for Jesus and for God's purposes in the world but that has slowly diminished in our lives and *only now* have we really seen how far we have drifted... and now we are wondering how to get that passion back!

## **A story of passion**

Read Mt 28: 1-9

The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Mt 28.8-9

The important thing to notice is that this is the *risen Jesus*. A passion for the living Jesus is the kind of passion we need. Not a passion for what Jesus did. No, the Christian life is one that is wrapped up in the life of the risen Jesus – among us even now. I think that is a really important point!

We can often be very good at focusing on the cross of Christ, but the cross finds its effective power *because* of the resurrection. It's a key theological point!!! And it is not the crucified Jesus whom we worship and focus our attention on - it is the Jesus who was crucified, buried, risen and ascended. We live because he is risen, we live because he is alive!

### **What kind of passion?**

Notice the mention of fear in this passage. The word fear is used a few times and in different ways. Eugene Peterson says – 'Fear-of-the-Lord is the stock biblical term for this either sudden or cultivated awareness that the presence or revelation of God introduces into our lives. We are not the centre of our existence. We are not the sum total of what matters. We don't know what's going to happen next'. He goes on to say, 'Fear-of-the-Lord keeps us on our toes with our eyes open. Something is going on around here, and we don't want to miss it. Fear of the Lord prevents us from thinking that we know it all. And it therefore prevents us from closing off our minds or our perceptions from what is new. Fear of the Lord prevents us from acting presumptuously and therefore destroying or violating some aspect of beauty, truth, or goodness that we don't recognize or don't understand.'<sup>1</sup>

A passion for Jesus has a texture to it – it is not a sentimental feeling, it is worship and adoration that has a healthy respect which is the source of our passion. Jesus isn't soft and cuddly; he is the creator of all that is! When we have a passion for something other than us, we decentre ourselves... again that is a good thing - we focus not on ourselves but on our Lord, upon our Master, upon our friend, Jesus. And like Mary, we worship Jesus and kneel in reverence and awe.

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<sup>1</sup> Living the Resurrection, 28

## **Spiritual formed in an atmosphere of resurrection wonder**

Child in the Snow – Story from Dangerous Wonder, p21 Mike Yaconelli

A W Tozer says, 'We cover our deep ignorance with words, but we are ashamed to wonder, we are afraid to whisper "mystery."

Robert Capon's Quote – Wonder and Astonishment...

Our journey of spiritual formation in the way of Jesus, of becoming like Jesus in our life style, needs to start from and be rooted in the soil of *resurrection wonder*. Eugene Peterson says that, 'without wonder, we approach spiritual formation as a self-help project. We employ techniques. We analyze gifts and potentialities. We set goals. We assess progress. Spiritual formation is reduced to cosmetics... Without wonder, the motivational energies in spiritual formation get dominated by anxiety and guilt. Anxiety and guilt restrict; they close us in on ourselves. They isolate us with feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness; they reduce us to ourselves at our worst. Spiritual formation is distorted into moral workaholism or pious athleticism.'<sup>2</sup>

You see, without resurrection wonder, our lives will turn on the wrong axis. It is easy to reduce God to our assistant who helps us out. Not one who we fall at the feet of and worship with reverence and intimacy. With passion and sincerity.

### **Passion grows in good soil**

We need to develop from the right starting point, which is from a life of wonder and mystery and love and grace. These are the nutrients and elements that will produce a good end... a life that is focused upon Jesus and his purposes in creation. That is the seedbed from which a harvest of righteous living grows. Righteousness is about being found in our right state - returning to our intended way of being. So our passion for Jesus must lead us to learning to live in the right way. Our passion therefore has a purpose!

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<sup>2</sup> Peterson, Living the Resurrection, 30-31

Dietrich Bonhoefer's book *The Cost of Discipleship*, highlights the many New Testament passages commanding Christians to attain holiness. Every call to conversion, he insists, includes a call, to Christ-likeness.<sup>3</sup> So becoming a Christian is an ongoing process – we are always *becoming*! Fully human in the way of Jesus, who shows us how to live! And for that kind of formation to work it needs to happen in a resurrection atmosphere of life. And also with a 'Fear-of-the-Lord' which opens us to the active presence of God in our midst. Awe and reverence needs to be the atmosphere in which we work out our everyday lives or else we risk missing the very heart of what is going on. It is the doorway to life in its fullest expression.

And when we think in terms of eternity, 'forever with God' then how we live now takes on a whole new dimension!

### **Neo's thought experiment. McLaren, New Kind of Christian, 86-87**

#### **Conclusion**

So let us develop as people with Passion for the Risen Jesus here in our midst, let us focus on him and invite him to stoke the fires of holy passion in our lives. If we have drifted or never before experienced this kind of passion then ask God to give it. For many we need to refocus our passion. For some our passion is distorted. For some we have wondered if we ever did have a passion for Jesus. Some of us have a passion for church... but miss the heart. Some of us have a passion only for ourselves and we need to repent and turn to God.

But whatever we are doing, whatever direction we are heading on, we need to be sure about the answer to this one question. Where does your passion lie? Is it the kind of passion that will stand me in good stead to live for all time in the presence of God?

So in the time we have left, let us respond! Let us give our lives afresh to God. Let us pray for one another and let us keep loving God with all of our passion, prayer and intelligence. For his glory!

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<sup>3</sup> Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, 184