

Mission: Not Crossing the Sea – Seeing the Cross!



What is Your Passion?

Do you know what it's like to have something that captivates you? Something that takes over your life, even for a short while? Something that excites you and troubles you, fills you with joy and frustration, a great passion that overwhelms all others?

Let me tell you a bit about my week...

Carolyn is in the process of starting up a small business called "Kindermusik with Carolyn". She has become a licensed Kindermusik educator and is going to be running some classes over the next few months in Narembeen. Last week I decided that I would help out by setting up a database for her so she could record details of people who had expressed interest or enrolled, send out letters and information lots of different tasks like that. It grew from something simple into something increasingly complex and grand. In fact, it took on a life of it's own! I was poring through the internet to find out how to set things up the way I wanted, I was redesigning forms in my sleep to make them simpler and more useful. I was jotting down ideas on my desktop that would come to me in the middle of preparing my Scripture lessons! Carolyn or the kids would speak to me while I was working on the laptop and I would be completely tuned out to them because I was concentrating so hard on what I was doing. Coffees went cold, bedtimes got late, family got a little ticked off!

Now, that may sound very strange to you, but for the last week making a whiz-bang database has been a consuming passion! What has been your passion this week? What is the consuming passion of your life? What gets your mind racing and heart pumping?

It could be your work, your relationships, sports, hobbies, studies or something else. Sadly, for some people the thing that excites the most passion in them is their sin, which is why they struggle so much to overcome it. I've been there, and it's not a nice condition to be in.

I want to suggest to you that the secret of mission is in finding a passion that produces action. ***What we care most about determines what we most do.***

Let's look at the example of Jesus to see how this worked for Him...

Philippians 2:1-11

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

⁶*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

⁷*but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

⁸*And being found in appearance as a man,*

*he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.* ¹

This is a wonderful passage, which has a lot to teach us. I want to focus on what it says about the attitude of Jesus Christ. He was in nature God, yet He did not consider His position, powers or privileges as something that should be held on to, He made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant – and not even an angelic servant, a human one! He became the lowest of the low, even to the point of dying a criminal's death, enduring human scorn and divine wrath as He took on Himself the penalty for the sin of the world.

Why would He do something so extremely degrading and difficult?

We know that it was not something that just happened to Him, with His followers trying to make the best of it afterward. It is something He chose to do. He even told us of it hundreds of years beforehand...

Isaiah 50:6-7

⁶ *I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;
I did not hide my face
from mocking and spitting.
⁷ Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,
I will not be disgraced.
Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.*

Here we see the attitude of Jesus toward His mission – “Yes it is tough, but I will not turn away from it.”

Again we ask, why? What is the passion that would cause Him to endure so much. What cause is so great as to be worth this sacrifice?

To find the answer to that question let's hit fast-forward and go to a time foretold in the Bible, a time fast approaching but not here yet, when Jesus will receive what is spoken of in Philippians 2 as God the Father publicly exalts Him to the highest place over all creation.

Revelation chapter 5 tells of the scene in Heaven when Jesus begins the process of taking ownership of this rebellious world, which is symbolised by a scroll – a title deed to the Earth. As he does so those present take up this song:

Revelation 5:9-10

*“...You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

¹All Scriptures from *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

We take up the story in Revelation 21, as the process of judging the earth has come to an end.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

I want you to picture in your mind what it must look like for God to see a world racked by sin and death. To grieve for a world in rebellion which experiences so much darkness, pain and struggle because of our independence from Him. To see acts of violence, hatred and greed which offend His nature of goodness.

Then contrast that picture with this picture of Heaven. No longer are we separated from Him, no longer do we scuttle around in darkness living lives that are like a vapour – here today and gone tomorrow. Instead there is eternal life and fellowship – no more sadness or mourning, pain or death. The old order is gone, the new is here.

In God’s picture of Heaven there are people from every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. They are there because they have heard the news of salvation in Jesus and they have believed. They have trusted God for eternal life and He has delivered.

Jesus came so that this picture of Heaven could become our reality. In His mind it was worth the struggle of His life, death and resurrection in order to bring that about. And we gratefully say “Thank you Lord that you felt that way”! “Thank you that you deemed our salvation to be worth Your sacrifice”.

And as we come before Him in thanksgiving we hear Him say – “Now you must have the same attitude”. Paul says *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”*

In Hebrews 12:1-3 we read...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Jesus looked beyond the struggle and saw the joy set before Him. Follow His example, be encouraged by His example. You will never face what Jesus faced, yet His Spirit is within you helping you to overcome. Fix your eyes on Jesus!

Mission, my friends, is not crossing the sea to serve God. Mission is seeing the cross and being so captivated by it that everything else pales in comparison.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2

“I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

We get another glimpse of Paul's attitude when we read his letter to Christians in Colossae who he'd never met personally. He's just been talking about how they had been saved through Christ's death on the cross for them, and he goes on to say...

Colossians 1:21-24

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

The phrasing is a bit unusual here and sometimes people miss the point of what Paul is saying. It's really pretty simple. The suffering of Jesus is what purchased our salvation. That work is complete and not lacking in any way – what remains is to give people an opportunity to receive it and grow in it. That is the work that Paul was called to – to proclaim Jesus so that the church may grow in number as people are saved, and so that the church may grow in maturity as Christians get to know Jesus better and follow Him more closely. That work of proclaiming life in Jesus is tough, but the struggles are worth it, just like Jesus' struggles were worth it.

Paul is doing what Hebrews 12 tells us all to do – he's running his race with his eyes on Jesus, and that's what gives him the passion to run well and not give up.

I want to ask you this morning - is Jesus your passion?

Are you prepared to add your sufferings to those of Jesus and Paul and every other Christian who has ever served God for the sake of His Church?

Do you think about what Jesus thought about – that heavenly picture of people from every tribe and language and people and nation together in an eternal kingdom? Do you think about the awful alternative of eternity without Christ?

Do you remember that you are not your own – that you have been bought at a price?

I know what it's like to be caught up in lesser passions. I'm the guy who gets excited about building a database for crying out loud!!

I know what it's like to be caught up in sinful passions.

I want to be caught up in the passion of knowing Jesus and making Him known.

I choose to be caught up in the passion of knowing Jesus and making Him known.

Will you?

What evidence will we see of that passion in your life?

Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus "became obedient to death – even death on a cross"

Paul was obedient to his commission to preach Christ to the Gentiles, even though it led to floggings and shipwrecks and imprisonments and eventually execution.

What will you become obedient to?

What is God calling you to?

- Pack some Christmas shoeboxes?
- Join the team of Craft Group...?

- Offer to teach Scripture in a local school? – Our government has asked for more Scripture teachers but the churches can't supply them!
- Join a home group?
- Reach out to someone who's lonely or in need?
- Show a Christian movie to your kids and their friends, or yourself and your friends.
- Take your relationships at work to a deeper level?

May your passion for Jesus cause you to do what seems beyond you. May you see the cross, and may it drive you forward to continue the mission of Jesus in bringing salvation to the lost.

May you set your face like flint, determined that nothing will hold you back from obeying your Lord. Knowing that the Sovereign Lord will be your strength and shield.

May what you fear pale into insignificance beside the glory of the One you love. May His eternal kingdom be of more worth to you than the pleasures and possessions of this life that soon fade away.

Amen.