

READING

Acts 9:36-43

SERMON

**Can I Be Passionate and Serve? – The Influence of Passion**

A new Baptist minister began his ministry in London. It was a notorious part of London for gangsters, but the church was not bothered by them and so all was harmonious. Then Big Eddie died. Big Eddie was the local gangster overlord. He had been responsible for fraud, for some murders and other crimes. The Baptist minister gets a visit from Eddie's brothers. They want the Baptist minister to take the funeral and they had one request – the Baptist minister had to say that Big Eddie was a saint.

“But, but,” the minister stammered. “Eddie was involved in fraud”

“True, true.”

“Big Eddie was involved in protection rackets.”

True, true, “replied the brothers.

“Big Eddie had some people murdered.”

“True, true.”

“And you want me to say that he was a saint!”

“Yep, and if you don't you could find yourself in the foundations of the new building at Gants Hills.”

The new, young Baptist minister was in a turmoil. How to keep his integrity and his life. It was the day of the funeral and there was a big crowd, some of the crowd looked ugly and mean – the minister noticed all the deacons had turned up! The minister began the address. “We are here today because of Big Eddie. Big Eddie as we all know was involved in fraud, he was involved in protection, he had murdered some people. But compared to Jim, he was an angel!”

At times it is difficult to see the good in people, to see their passion at times. In the gospels we read.

**“Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'"** (John 18:10-11 NIV)

Simon Peter, the passionate apostle who always went for the action, but one of his passions was justice. Remember when at Caesarea Philippi and Jesus said to his disciples

**“...Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** (Matthew 16:13 NIV)

Peter was the one who answered

**“...''You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"** (Matthew 16:16 NIV)

And then went on to say, well turn with me to Matthew 16:17, page 983

**"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.**" (Matthew 16:17-20 NIV)

So Peter is complimented. He had noticed and realised that Jesus was the Christ – the one sent by God to save his people. Then it continues

**"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"**" (Matthew 16:21-22 NIV)

The passion for justice came out in Peter but this overrode all else. He did not see the bigger picture, but justice was his thing. Of course on this occasion he got it wrong and so we have Jesus saying to him

**"..."Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**" (Matthew 16:23 NIV)

At time the passion of Peter ran away with him. On this occasion at Caesarea Philippi and when Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and he cut off the servant's ear. 'They cannot arrest my Lord, they cannot arrest Jesus. It's not fair, it's not just. I must do all I can to stop them.' Thwack with the sword and one ear gone for a burton, although Jesus did repair it immediately.

But when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that some believers had accepted the Word of God they sent Peter and John to investigate. And we read

**"When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 8:15-17 NIV)

That was Peter's passion for justice coming out. Why should they not too be baptised in the Spirit. And if you know the story you will remember one Simon the Sorcerer whom they came across who tried to buy the gift of giving the Holy Spirit from them, but again Peter's sense of justice came out.

Thankfully, though, God has made us different.

- As we have seen, we have different spiritual gifts, gifts to us by God, the *pneumatikos*, the gifts of the *pneuma*, the Spirit, so no-one can boast and those gifts, *charisma* are given by the *charis*, the grace of God.
- Our personalities are different and that is great. We need all the colours of personality that God has given us – even the one that is in conflict with me!
- Then, too, God gives us a passion.

Passion come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. For the Christian when we hear the word Passion we often think about the sufferings of Christ and that is a right definition of the word Passion, but today we are talking about the word Passion meaning

## **Any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling or desire, as love or hate**

In Acts 9 we read about a lovely lady, the lady called Dorcas or Tabitha. It depended on whether you were speaking to us in Greek or Aramaic. We have similar things happen here. Dorcas was a lovely lady and she had the talent of needlework. She could make garments, she had the gift of helps. Acts 9:36

**“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.”** (Acts 9:36 NIV)

She had the gift of helps, but her passion was those who were poor. This combined into the fact that she made clothes for the poor. She when she died, we read

**“Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.”** (Acts 9:39 NIV)

In those days it was the widows who were among the poorest in society. What a wonderful lady to use her talent, her gift, her passion for God. We are not told about her personality, but it is not vital to this.

So what about us? What about today? Does having a passion for something immediately force us down a particular path. Let me tell two stories about two friends, Dan and Rob. They are both Baptist ministers who trained together and have been firm friends since that time.

- Let us come to Dan. Dan has a passion to save people. He has a passion to see people come into the kingdom of God. Dan is not really turned on by most of what happens at church, but he loves reaching out to the community around the church. He is constantly driving the church to do outreach, to evangelise, evangelise, evangelise because he says that this is the only thing that is important. The midweek groups constantly study evangelism – why they should do it, how they should do it. The church has been through a different method six months. The Sunday sermons are to do with going out into the community and telling people the gospel. Dan is a good speaker and can seem to say the whole gospel in two minutes in an understandable way that people who are not Christians respond to. Dan is the sort of man who if he was at a bus queue would have most of the queue converted by the time the bus came along. It had been known for some people to miss the first bus they had wanted, just to carry on listening to Dan.

However Dan became despondent with church. Not with the church people because they were lovely and as Dan was a young man, they put up with his passion to convert everyone, seemingly at the expense of all else. Dan wasn't really into church fully, the meetings and everything that goes with it. He had the gift of evangelism, he had the personality of a Paul – it was a driver red, a go-getter and his passion was for non-Christians, see men and women come to God and make that decision to follow Christ, to use the words of John 1:12

**“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—”** (John 1:12 NIV)

He knew that converting people was God's work, but that he needed to be obedient to God and tell people about what Jesus had done, and that the people still had to make a decision to put their trust in God, to have faith in him.

So what did Dan do? Dan wanted to go it alone. He prayed about the situation and spoke to various people, who agreed to support him and he wanted to go as an itinerant evangelist. He would still want to have those to whom he was answerable to, a board of management. In time

he would develop a team around him, but he knew his passion would always be to win men and women for Christ.

- Then there is Dan's friend Rob. Rob has a similar passion to Dan – he too wants to see people come into the kingdom of God; he too wants to win people for Christ. And near to Rob there is going to be built a small town of some 20,000 population. Rob is terribly excited about the prospect of getting someone into the new town as it is being built. It would be a church plant, a completely new church in a new area.

Some people suggested that Rob move into the new town as soon as the houses begin to go up. He obviously has the burden, the vision, the passion, some of those around him are saying, so God is obviously calling him. But Rob does not have the gift of evangelism – he has the gift of discipleship. He is a nurturer and his personality is that of a Moses, a blue, a strategist, not a pioneer, not a go-getter like his friend Dan.

However what Rob did was to call the local churches together and have them say that they would help fund a person to be there from the start. He also filled in the forms for a Home Mission grant and went to meetings to talk about a house for the minister and liaise with the local ecumenical council, who were more than delighted to have a Baptist there on the ground from the beginning.

In fact what happened then was that Dan and Rob met up and they were talking about different things in their lives and Dan said, "Why don't I be the evangelist in the new town, and when they are converted, I will pass them on to you for nurturing. Then when the group from the town is large enough we will begin a church there. How's about I give the next three years to this project." Rob thought it a great idea and this is what happened.

Both men had the same passion, but different gifts, different personalities, but God used them both. In all of this God comes first. It is God who gives the gifts, God who puts together our personality, God who gives us our passion – where we are to work.

Are you prepared to put God first and give all to him? And can I be passionate and serve? I would say that you cannot serve without passion – but remember different personalities, different people express their passions differently