

Sermon June 6, 2010  
Galatians 1:11-24

## **Introduction**

The Apostle Paul, a person whose name is often mentioned during church worship services (sermons in particular), bible studies, prayer groups, and just about any other gathering that brings Christians together. How many of us here today know of the Apostle Paul? I would imagine it was most if not all of us.

But what makes Paul so popular amongst Christians, especially us Protestants? Is it his personality, his charisma, or his teachings? Is it all of his writings? Is it his story? Or is it the way in which he lived his life or what he did? The more I think about it the more I am convinced there is not one definite answer; different people might like him for different things! One thing is certain though, to talk about Paul is to talk about Christianity, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which he proclaimed until the day he died.

That is the reason why I admire Paul so much, because he literally dedicated his life to going around, everywhere he could possibly get to in order to share with the people there that great message of Salvation; the Good News of the Gospel of the Messiah Jesus Christ, who had died for the forgiveness of sin.

Our scripture lesson today came from Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, whom (according to Luke's account in the book of Acts) Paul himself had started during his first missionary journey. Paul writes this letter as an immediate and crucial response to a new message that was being proclaimed amongst the believers in Galatia; this message was twisting the Gospel of Grace, which Paul had preached, and added a pre-requisite to God's gift of Salvation: there was a need for new believers to be circumcised and uphold the Law of Moses before they were "eligible."

Paul saw this message as a threat to the authentic gospel message that salvation is a free gift from God, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ and not through human actions. Paul feels so passionately about this, that he is more than willing to defend his position and crush this false gospel with the truth of the real message, which had been given to him by Jesus Christ himself.

Passion, that is one of the things that I think sets Paul apart. He was a very passionate man and he knew it. He reminds the churches of Galatia of how committed he was to Judaism, and to eradicating the church of God, to the point of attempting to destroy it completely. He also reminds them of his conversion on the road to Damascus and how his life's passion took a definitive turn. From that time on, Paul went from persecuting to proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.

Passion, that was the driving force that allowed Paul to become the channel through which the true Gospel of Jesus Christ began to spread like wild fire. I imagine that passion is also what made Paul so effective in moving people to believe in the

message of salvation. Passion is what gave him never-ending strength and the fearlessness to take the gospel as far as his legs would take him, and then some.

As this message began to take form I noticed I kept coming back to the word Passion. Passion to me is what made Paul, Paul. He wouldn't have done half of what he did had he not been passionate about what he believed in. He would have never persecuted the followers of "The Way" in the same manner; he would have never been on the way to Damascus, which means he would have not encountered Jesus the way he did. Without passion he would have never put his life at risk for the sake of the gospel.

So then I started to think, what exactly is passion? It is defined as a "**strong but controllable emotion. An intense desire or enthusiasm for something.**" A strong (and sometimes barely) controllable emotion, yup, that sounds about right. When I think about what I am passionate about, I can begin to realize the things that I am willing to do, and to put up with, because of my strong emotion and intense desire.

For example, I am a passionate movie watcher. I can watch as many movies in one day as I can possibly fit. One weekend (while Bre was away), my brother Mario and I watched 10 movies, 6 of which we watched on Saturday (as you can see, he is just as passionate as I am). I am also passionate about languages, and English happens to be one of my favorites. I am always learning new words, the last of which was in the midst of a passion shared by about 500,000 racing fans. Last weekend Bre and I headed out to Indianapolis to watch the Indy 500 at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and it was then when I learned the word mound, which I will continue to use as much as I can from now on.

Sports can certainly inspire passion in a person. You name a sport; there is a crowd that follows it almost, and sometimes even, religiously. Sports have a way of making those who follow them feel all sorts of strong emotions: happiness, sadness, pleasure, anger, frustration, etc. Sometimes these emotions are so strong that they can take a serious toll on a person's body: I remember the story of Terry O'Neill, age 50, who is a Pittsburgh fan that while watching the Steelers vs. Colts game on January 15, 2006 had a heart attack seconds after Jerome Bettis fumbled the ball trying to score late in the fourth quarter. Thankfully he made a full recovery and the Steelers went on to win the super bowl that year!

The world is also getting ready to come together around an event that only takes place every four years: you guessed it, the FIFA World Cup, which starts this Friday! Soccer fans all over the globe will be getting up at odd hours of the night, skipping work, or otherwise finding ways in which to satisfy their intense desire to watch the matches.

Think about what you are passionate about, chances are you are passionate about at least one thing. Think about what you are willing to do because of your passion, have you ever done anything that to you was perfectly normal but to others may

have seemed extreme or crazy? I know Bre loves me, but I doubt that I could get her to watch 6 movies in a row with me and my brother!

Passion, it allows us to do and say things that we would otherwise never dream of. It also allows us to bond in a special way with others who share that same barely controllable emotion. Paul was passionate about the message of Salvation that he had heard, which is the reason why he couldn't help but to go on missionary journeys to share with others the great news of the forgiveness of sin! His passion is what empowered him to arrive at a city and immediately begin to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah. His passion was so contagious that people responded and were converted in massive numbers and he started new churches almost everywhere he went.

The Evangelism and Member Care Team here at Fairmont has been reading a book called "Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism by Martha Grace Reese." Though I have only started reading the book, I have already felt the impact it's had in my own life and my outlook on evangelism. On chapter 2, the author poses the following questions: "why is it important to you that you are a Christian? And what difference does it make in your life?" According to Reese, these are not only very important but also very difficult questions to answer. Why is it important to you that you are a Christian, and what difference does it make in your life? I think she is right; it was surprisingly difficult for me to answer these two questions.

But you see, only by beginning to understand why something is important to us, can we begin to be passionate about it. We cannot possibly be passionate about something that is not important to us; we cannot be passionate about something that doesn't mean much to us. Also, It is only when something is important to us that it can begin to make a difference in our lives. Reese says that only when our faith is important to us, and it makes a difference in our lives, are we willing to share it with others. And that my dear sisters and brothers, is what evangelism is, sharing our faith with others.

I watch movies because they help me to relax and lose stress, I like learning new words in English because they help me to be a better communicator, I like playing and watching sports because they make me feel alive. But why do I come to church on Sunday mornings? Why I do pray to God when I am thankful, or scared, or in need? Why do I give of my money and time to the church? Is it because that's what I have been taught to do, or is there something else driving me to do those things? *If* you do these things, why do you do them?

Paul was passionate about telling others about the message of Salvation of Jesus Christ because of what it meant for him. That message changed his life forever, and it was because of it that he lived and died. This message was so important to Paul that he couldn't keep his mouth shut when he heard of what was happening in the churches of Galatia! He couldn't bear the thought of that wonderful gospel of grace being twisted by others seeking to pervert it; so he spoke up, and he shared his faith with the believers in Galatia.

Why is it important to us that we are Christian, and what difference does it make in our lives? Seeking to answer these questions will help us to become more like Paul, it will help us to be more passionate about our faith, what we believe in, and will not only empower us but also encourage us to share that faith with others. It will, believe it or not, make us evangelists! Because to me, evangelism is not about chasing down the un-churched and beating them over the head with threats about the final judgment and hell; no, to me evangelism is more about sharing with the people you encounter, about your own experience with the living God, talking about your God-moments, talking about why you come to church and why it is important and worth it for you.

When we recognize something as being important, it makes a difference in our lives and then we are more likely to talk about it. Now, being passionate about our faith doesn't mean that we become obsessed with it, for there is a difference between being passionate about something, and being obsessed with something. An obsession is uncontrollable in nature, but a passion, though strong, is always controllable. Being passionate (and not obsessed) about our faith allows us to share it with others in a way that does not bring forth judgment or causes them to be isolated should they not share it with us.

Let us celebrate the joy of knowing that we are the beloved children of God, and that He loved us so much that He sent Jesus Christ the Messiah to die on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins so that every person that believes in Him might be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ came to this world so that we may live abundant lives here on earth and be resurrected with Him to a life everlasting.

May God give each and every one of us the courage and strength to be more open to share our faith with others each and every day for the rest of our lives. Amen