

## Passionate

Matthew 11:12-13 NIV

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

## Have You Become Boring?

When I was a young pastor, I was going door-to-door sharing the Gospel and met a guy who was rather belligerent with me. He debated my take on the scriptures, questioned me about Jesus and argued against salvation by grace. Finally, after he was satisfied with my responses, he let me in on his secret. He was a born again Christian. It turned out that he had been a Jehovah's Witness who had once debated Christians throughout the Bay Area and most times got the best of them. In fact he was the most skilled throughout the Bay Area of all the Jehovah's Witnesses at refuting the claims of Christian apologists. That is until he became a born again Christian himself. Then he began to tear apart the arguments of Jehovah's Witnesses who challenged him to debates. We became close friends and one day he came to my office and asked me if I wanted to go to the temple of a local cult group. I had never heard of Iglesia Ni Cristo so it was kind of like a field trip for me. My friend was a powerful man, a former kick boxing champion who lifted weights all the time. He was certainly not afraid of anyone. When we got to the temple we found it gated but the entrance was open so we just drove in and started looking around. Someone in a black suit and tie greeted us with a bit of a scowl and asked what we wanted. My friend said he was interested in taking a class on the church and so we were invited inside. Soon we were surrounded at a large table by six or seven men and several others who stood on the sides and watched us closely. The leader began to take us through the rudimentary teachings and we just listened as he explained the early history of the movement. When my friend started asking questions about the beliefs of the church, it got tense fast. He asked what they believed about the divinity of Christ and what scriptures they used to justify their teachings and arms all around us

started crossing, frowns turned to scowls and it suddenly felt like the air was being sucked out of the room. My friend looked at me and nodded to the door. I took his hint and we both got up and excused ourselves. We thanked the group for the hospitality and got to the car as quickly as possible. As we were driving off, my friend told me that it was the first time in his life he had ever met with a cult group and felt scared for his life. I asked him what made him want to go in the first place and he just grinned. I knew why he went.

We mostly live pretty boring lives. We don't do anything extraordinary. We don't take big risks. We don't attempt difficult challenges. We live generally in a lower gear, not going too fast; just fast enough to get where we need to go. When was the last time you did something risky at work? How about at school? Have you ever made a bold stand there? What about among your peers? Have you taken a risk with them? Have you ever said something that could get you ostracized; taken a chance that might cause you to be despised? Does your family see you as a big, bold risk taker or more of a casual participant? Is it better to "go crazy" or stay calm, better to take big risks or play it safe? Does the Bible have anything to say about this?

We tend to think of the Bible's take on passion and such as pro "meek and mild". Probably it is because we misunderstand Jesus' teaching in the Bible about the meek inheriting the earth. Without getting into that particular Beatitude, it would be good for us to take a look at the Bible's view of passion. We can't go very far in this without remembering that Jesus in Revelation told the Church that he hated lukewarm Christians. Be hot or cold but don't be lukewarm. In sermons and Bible studies this strong statement has been repeated Ad nauseum and yet we don't make much of its personal application. God despises stale Christianity that has no punch to it, isn't disruptive or rattle its surroundings. You flinch at hot and cold; you barely react to lukewarm

Consider our key passage. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

If this were talking about Islam or taken from the Koran, we would say, “but of course”. That is what Islam is about. That is how Islam operates. But the fact that this is Jesus saying that the Kingdom of God is forcefully advancing and forceful people take hold of Christianity seems odd. It is like Jesus is saying Christianity is a hurricane or a tornado, a Tsunami or a blazing forest fire rather than a calm sea or a gentle breeze. And more than that, it is a Tsunami type person or a hurricane type person that embraces Christianity. We most certainly have lost our bearings when we think about Christian living and acting. The Christian who is forceful or brash in his demeanor is scorned in the church more often than not...he is considered too pushy or too overbearing. We tend to be more like Michal who told her husband, the King David, he needed to calm down when he worshipped; not be so wild and outlandish. Would David in our time and in our church be warmly received if he danced like a whirling dervish and took off his shirt as he worshipped the Lord?

Isn't it astounding that you have the ability to say “no” to God, the ruler and sustainer of the universe? Or is it more stunning that you have the same ability to say “no” to Satan who is the prince of this world and the vile destroyer Apollyon? This is no small thing when you consider his place among us. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (Revelation 9: 7-11 NIV) Even the most emaciated and weak minded Christian can say “no” to this monstrous evil and push him back. You do not have to give in to his commands nor wince at his threats. You can force your way upon him with the same ferocity as you can veer off the road with God. Satan is not your biggest enemy. It is you that you must fear most.

All of the great men and women of the Bible were forceful and bursting with passion. Think of Abraham, up on the top of Mt. Moriah with his son bound up by ropes and his hand raised with a dagger ready to push it down into his boy's chest out of obedience to the Lord's command. That is passion, hard, direct passion. Consider Elijah, up on Mt. Carmel, surrounded by hundreds of pagan priests who were trying to call fire down from the heavens but couldn't. Elijah berated them, insulted them, mocked them even with the pagan king himself there watching. And then Elijah put his own sacrifice on the rocks and had gallons and gallons of water poured on it and on the altar and without giving in to whatever fear he might have had that God would do nothing for him, he cried out for fire to come down from heaven and burn up the sacrifice. That is passion, unmitigated passion and that was what God liked and wanted. When Michal mocked David for being too passionate about God, the Lord made her childless. I think, perhaps you do too, that God made it clear what sort of Christian he wanted. Jehoshaphat was so passionate about God that rather than cowering in fear at the threat of the vast armies of the Moabites, he with unbending courage faced them with his best worshippers and praisers at the front of the column and did not stop advancing until his men destroyed the forces of Moab. Passion.

When Christ said that the gate of Hell shall not overcome the Church he meant that Hell's kingdom could not hold back forceful Christian people who come up against it. The Lord intends for His people to be moving forward, going out against impossible odds and doing things that reasonable people would not attempt. It is the stuff of Christianity to be unstoppable and unflinchingly courageous. Without passion there is nothing to speak of regarding a walk with God. Isn't it time that you wiped the sleep from your eyes and started burning with the fire of God in your belly...time to do something brash, something bold in the Name of Christ? Stand up for God in your classroom. Express your thoughts to the editor of the newspaper. Tell your supervisor why you are a Christian. Beat against the door of an addiction and attack it whole-heartedly. Give up an ungodly relationship. Invite your neighbors over for a barbecue and talk about your faith. Change your career if that is what God is saying. Start planning for a mission trip. Make a huge sacrifice for God that will astound even you. Finally change majors and do what you think God wants you to do with your life. Quit

being lukewarm; live with the fire of God burning within you. Let it blaze brightly and let God consume you. Let us all raise the banner of Christ and march forward! Let's shout our praise! Give it a big booming blast!