



Whoever
wants to
become great
among you
must be your
servant. Mark 10:43

August 5, 2007

Pursuing a Passion for Christ: In our Character

What are you passionate about? I think what we're passionate about says a lot about who we are. It shows what we're willing to spend out time with and what we're willing to expend our energy on. One thing I noticed about our passions is that we know a lot about them that you can't be passionate about something you don't know anything about and so for the next two weeks my sermon title is "Pursuing a Passion for Christ" and today we're going to talk about pursuing a passion for Christ in our character. The way we're going to do that is by talking about Jesus Christ and as I said before we can't be passionate about something that we don't know about, it's the same with Jesus we don't know about who he is we can't really be passionate about him. So I want to talk about this morning about Jesus Christ, as he is the word incarnate, he is God who became man.

One interesting thing is that Jesus takes on an attribute which he did not have before which is humanity. Jesus was the word and he wasn't a human before the incarnation. It's strange to think about that Jesus took on humanity and that's an attribute that he didn't have before and now he has forever. The other thing about the incarnation that's so astounding is that it is eternity, God himself, who is eternal, stepping into time. But when we talk about Jesus I think sometimes we focus so much on his deity that we forget about the fact that he was human. If we see Jesus as only divine then he can't be our example to follow. Jesus is fully God and fully man so we can follow him. I think this is illustrated in John 4:4-6 where it says, "Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour." Did you catch that? Jesus being wearied from his journey was sitting by the well. Jesus was tired is that strange to think about? If we truly accept the humanity of Jesus Christ it shouldn't be strange but when I read it and struck me as being strange it showed me that I hadn't really taken the humanity of Jesus Christ seriously. John in 1 John takes pains to describe that Jesus was human when he writes in 1:1-3, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we

have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” John mentions the words seen, heard, touched, manifested, he sounds like a kid on Christmas or a kid in a candy store he’s excited and he takes these pains to describe the humanity of Jesus Christ that Jesus came in the flesh but from us sometimes the sinlessness and the deity of Christ causes us to think of him somehow as different from us. We may say that we should imitate him but really in our minds we don’t really think that we can imitate him because he is Jesus he is God how can I imitate him? But the fact that he’s fully man means he lived the life that we are supposed to live the life we were made to live. So when we’re pursuing a passion for Christ in our character we need to look at the character of Jesus Christ and there are a number of things that we can take from Jesus. We are going to look at a couple of them this morning.

The first one is that Jesus had a religious life. In Luke 4 Luke mentions this to us in 4:16 where it says, “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.” Jesus regularly went there. Part of his religious life was going to the synagogue it was something he regularly did. Jesus was also a person of prayer. Numerous times in the gospels we read this, in Mark 1:35 it talks about Jesus going to secluded places to pray. I know in our busy lives sometimes we think that we’re too busy to pray. There is a book called, “Too Busy to Pray” and it’s strange to think that Jesus himself took time to pray. Why is that strange? He was probably busier than any of the rest of us are. He had crowds following him and flocking to him yet he still took out time to pray.

He was also compassionate, he touched lepers, he raised a widow’s son, and he forgave others even when he was on the cross he forgave other people. I think one important aspect about his religious life is it did not exist merely in practices it wasn’t just routines that he did, going to synagogues, helping others his religious life showed itself in his life. He talked about forgiving others and loving your neighbor and he actually did it. They were just these routines but it was a way of life for him. Another part of his religious life is Jesus was faithful in the mundane things.

We don’t really know a lot about what happened in Jesus’ life before he was 30. There are a couple instances about his birth and there’s one instance of when he was 12 but the rest of the instances in Jesus’ life happened after he was 30 and even then we don’t have a comprehensive picture. What was he doing before he was 30? We don’t really know but it seems he was responsible for what God had on his plate at the time. He was probably a carpenter; it seems by the time his ministry started his father had died so he could have taken

over the family business. He went to the synagogue and took care of his family he studied the scriptures wasn't anything that remarkable. Even in his three years of ministry we look and he proclaimed the truth when he was given the opportunity, he disciplined a small group of men and get this, he was remarkably patient because he waited until he was 30 for him to begin his ministry. So he was responsible for the small things in his life a lot of things in his life may not appear to be that extraordinary. When we compare our lives to Jesus' religious life there's a sense we can't be legalist checking on prayer, reading scripture and coming to church is our requirements but there is a sense in which we can see through certain practices we're reading the word we're worshiping and desiring to do these things we can't think that these things achieve our salvation or somehow make God happy but there's a sense that we can tell how we are doing when we see these practices becoming more apparent in our life.

Jesus also opposed hypocrisy. He denounces the Pharisees pretty strongly we see in fact in Matthew 23:25-28, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." He continues on, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. When Jesus denounces the Pharisees he does so from a broken heart. He doesn't denounce them out of some superiority that he has but he rebukes them because he honestly wants them to change.

One thing that is remarkable about Jesus is that he denounced those on the inside that were religious but those on the outside he showed gentleness to, sinners, prostitutes he showed gentleness to them and this is often the opposite of what we do today. We denounce those outside of the church yet we tolerate hypocrisy inside the church. We rebuke those outside of the church and become angry when they don't live the way that we do and live the way they should but why should they don't follow God they don't believe in him they don't follow Jesus Christ so why should they live the way we do? But yet we allow many of those very things we denounce outside of the church to occur inside the church without a word. We're so afraid of offending other people that we don't want to confront anyone and tell them when they're sinful. But Jesus did he tried to root out hypocrisy of the "religious" not of the sinners. We see that Jesus had a religious life, he opposed hypocrisy also Jesus was a servant.

We see this most explicitly in John 13:1-16, "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

The thing about the Kingdom of God is that the greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves. One component of servant hood is love. At the last supper did you know that Jesus washed the feet of Judas? He washed the feet of the man who is about to betray him. That is challenging to me. That leads me to ask the question how do we treat those who are not in agreement with us? Who do not share our ideas or personalities? Do we still love them? Love them as in not saying bad things about them or maybe saying hi to them and asking them how they are doing. Do we really love those who don't agree with us? Another aspect of servant hood is humility. Before I used to think that humility was down playing your strengths but it is not being overly concerned about your prestige. Also it is recognizing your dependence on God. This is pretty counter-cultural because our American culture teaches us that we're supposed to be independent also it says we need to show off how good we are and what great things we have. That's no humility according to the bible. What does it mean for us to be humble? Does it mean sacrificing our goals, desires maybe even our preferences for the good of others? Humility so often entails sacrifice, which is also another characteristic of a servant. In John 13 Jesus washes the disciples feet but in John 12 Jesus rides into Jerusalem. The Messiah was to ride in to Jerusalem to conquer but Jesus rode through Jerusalem as a servant to die. Sacrifice means laying it all down giving it all up. I don't what that means for you or what it

means for me maybe it means giving up our money maybe our lives. Being humble also means not insisting on our rights I don't necessarily mean that in the political sense but think about this. Jesus Christ the one through whom the entire universe was created, he out of anyone else who lived on earth should be able to insist on his own way but when he was on earth he never did. He died even when he shouldn't have had to so if anyone should have insisted on his own rights it was Jesus but he never did. He says it mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Do we insist our own rights here? Maybe you have a favorite pew that you like to sit in but if someone else is there do you become angry? Insist that you should sit there because you always have? That's an example of insisting on our own way in way that Jesus most likely wouldn't have.

So we've talked about Jesus having a religious life, Jesus opposing hypocrisy, and Jesus being a servant, now I want to talk about obedience. Jesus says that if we love him we will obey his commandments. Right there we see that we obey not out of duty but out of love. Acts 9:10-17, the context of this is Saul has seen Jesus on the rode to Damascus he was on his way to persecute and kill Christians and Jesus appeared to him on the rode which causes him to become blind and he goes to a city where he awaits for the direction from God but we pick up in verse ten where it says, "In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Can you imagine being in the shoes of Ananias? Can you imagine what he may have been thinking? He was about to go to a man who had persecuted many of Ananias' fellow Christians killed and beat them and put them in prison and Jesus asks him to go talk to him. Would we? Sometimes we're called to of things we don't want to do maybe things that are outside of our comfort zone. We're called to do that a lot. Ananias was called to that and he obeyed the question is would we? I do want to point out an area in the life of Jesus where this happens is when Jesus is at the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26. Here we see that Jesus is wrestling hard with the will of God he sees it is God's will for

him to go to the cross but he doesn't want to. He knows not only the physical pain he will go through but also the psychological and spiritual pain that he will be separated from God because he will be taking on the sins of the whole world. He prays that he wouldn't have to do it he prays according to his desires but ultimately he desires for the will of God and I think that there's a tremendous application. Ultimately we need to submit to god's will. When we pray in Jesus name we say that so often we're really praying in his submission that not my will but your will. Something that is hard for us to grasp is that sometimes the answer to our prayers is no. Somethings aren't in the will of God and God doesn't want us to do certain things. The question we have to ask is are we still willing to be obedient to him when the answer is no?

So we have seen in the life of Jesus he had a religious life, a lot of his life was mundane, but he's faithful in all those things, he opposed hypocrisy but he chastised those who were inside who called themselves religious but weren't acting that way and he comforted those who were outside, he showed gentleness to those outside, he was a servant, he showed love and sacrificed, and he was obedient even when he didn't want to. Jesus is fully God but is also fully man and because he is fully man he is whom we can look to as our example to follow. We are to abide in him. Stay close with, remain in the teaching s of Jesus and remain in your relationships with him. Do we recognize Jesus is our example? Ultimately we need to follow him.