

Passion

James 3:13-4:10

“Your passions are at war with you.” We are told to follow our passions. Young people are told to “find their passion” so they know what to do with their life. Passion is one of those words that our society has twisted around. You have been told that to have “passion” for something is an expression of deep and abiding love. That is the way our culture likes to use the word.

Check out a good dictionary. You won’t find any mention of “love” until the 4th or 5th definition. In my college dictionary, the number one definition was “a fit or violent anger.” Be careful when you tell the one you love of your “passion” for them. The best definition that brings all of the meaning of the word together is “An intense, compelling emotional desire that causes suffering.”

There is a reason that the events of Christ’s life, as He enters Jerusalem and ultimately is nailed to the cross – there is a reason this is called His Passion. He was compelled to endure the pain, the beatings, the mockery, the nails on the cross. He was compelled to be that sacrifice because of His intense desire to save you. Certainly, this can be called love, but it is not the kind of love our culture equates with passion. Passion is a compelling desire that leads to suffering.

James says, “Your passions are at war with you. You desire and do not have.” Do you not realize that it is your passions that cause your suffering? All these things that you are compelled to have.

A couple of weeks ago, I said in my sermon, “All sin boils down to a lack of being content with what God has given you. If you steal what does not belong to you, why do you do this? You are not content with what God has given. Adultery in its many forms happens because you are not content with whom God has given you.

Coveting, by definition, is a lack of contentment. Bearing false witness, slander, gossip, speaking ill of others happens why? You think that you are getting the short end of the stick and these others need to be knocked down a peg (to where they belong). Because you are not content with the place in life God has given you.”

This is what James is saying as he says, “You desire and do not have.” And it goes beyond your desire to have more stuff in your home or garage. As I also said a few weeks ago, “Being controlled by someone or something is a miserable existence. This is why addiction is such a terrible thing.” But addiction comes in more ways than just chemical.

The TV show “Hoarders” is dedicated to passion – an intense, emotional, compelling desire, and the compelling desire, even though it leads to suffering – the compelling desire controls the person.

Now, that is the extreme case, and we can sit here and say, “those people” are totally irrational. But what is your passion that others possibly think is totally irrational?

Football season is here. Are you a “fan?” You do know that “fan” is short for “fanatic?” Look up the definition of that word. One definition I found was: “a person with an extreme and uncritical enthusiasm or zeal.

If you are a “passionate” sports fan, do you think all of your loved ones understand your “passion?” Or do they think you are irrational. Does your passion for sports cause suffering? And I am not just talking about the kind of suffering that Cubs fans have endured – although their suffering has been great.

If your “passion”, whatever it may be, gets in the way of your relationship with the ones you love, or more importantly, gets in the way of your relationship with your Father in heaven who loves you, then the suffering side of passion manifests itself.

I see this in the irrational sports schedules that are imposed, especially on children. It could be a person’s love for the outdoors. I had a member in Wisconsin who bow hunted every single day from September through the end of the year – except during the 9 days of rifle season. For many, golf is a passion. It could be collecting various items about which you are passionate. For some, exercise is a passion. I don’t have that issue. For some, dieting is a passion – again, there is no need to state the obvious.

Many of our revered members of society are passionate about their work. Who can criticize hard work? My vicarage supervising pastor pointed out one of the members of our church who worked 70-80 hours a week. He said no one in the church should be able to

outwork the pastor. I asked him how beneficial that work schedule was for their family life. Passion, by definition, leads to suffering.

It could be the routine weekend party binge that leaves you with your head in your hands saying, “Why do I keep doing this to myself?”

Now don't get me wrong, being involved in sports, loving the outdoors, collecting items of interest all have their place. These are all things I do. I am a supporter of hard work. I believe that diet and exercise are important. Even Jesus drank wine with His disciples. The problem comes with passion. The compelling desire – even when it leads to suffering. The compelling desire that pulls you away from Christ and His church. That is the definition of an unhealthy passion.

It leads to fighting and quarreling, misguided energy, friendship with the world and God is viewed as the enemy. That is what happens when passions consume you.

The good things that God has given – nature to enjoy, physical ability to play a game, the resources to seek out and purchase items of value – these all come from His hand and they are to be blessings to you. As I said before, the key is finding contentment. When you find contentment in what you have, that is the greatest of God's earthly blessings.

The Passion that should consume you is the Passion of Christ. We look to those wounds. We look to the pain He endured. He suffered His Passion for you. His love for you compelled Him to place Himself between you and the wrath of God's judgment. He took the suffering and pain for you. Christ has Passion for you. Amen.