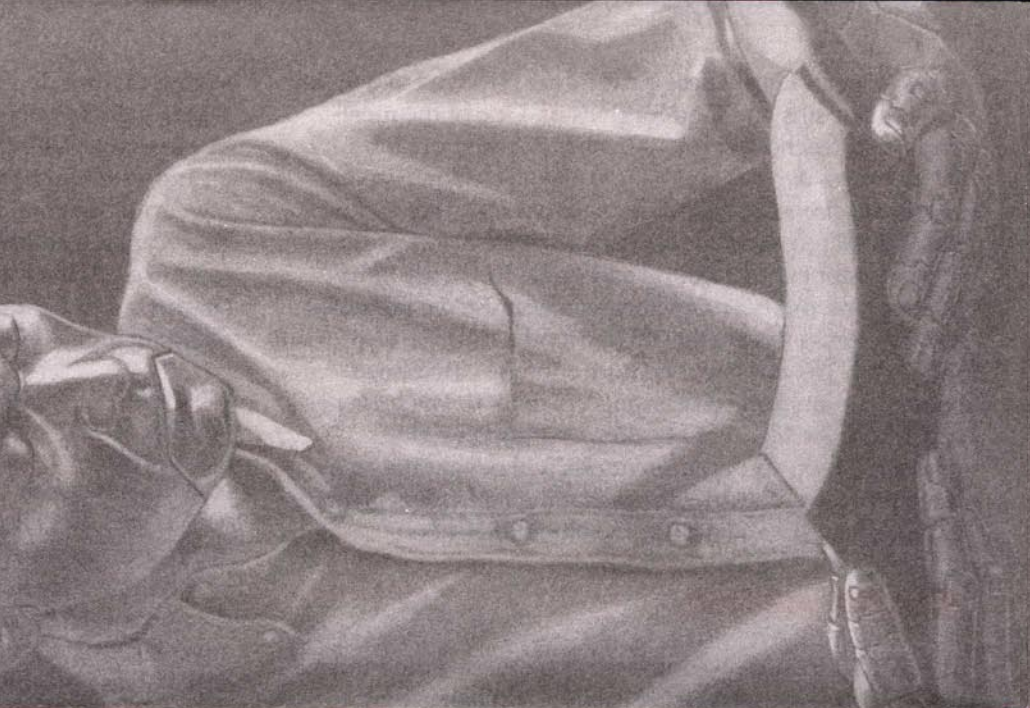


PASSION FOR JESUS

by
Dr. Jack Deere



As Jesus was hanging on the cross, He looked out on a universe from which every visible trace of God seemed to have disappeared. All but one of His disciples had deserted him. Only John and four women were standing at the foot of the cross. Jesus looked down and saw His mother. Who would take care of her now? His brothers? The apostles? No, they had all deserted Him. It's as though He looked at John and said in His spirit, "John, no one else will do for my mother." Then out loud for all to hear He said, "Woman, behold your son." And then to John, "Behold your mother." (John 19:26,27). John really



was the best friend of the Lord Jesus. But John doesn't have to be the only one who is his best friend.

We all have only one brief hour on the earth and then we will stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account of our lives. Why not be like Mary and choose the best part, the one necessary thing, so that we can stand before Him in confidence on that day? The heart of the Lord Jesus is big enough to accommodate many, many more best friends and many, many more Marys. Why would you want to settle for any less?



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Almost any Christian can tell you what the greatest commandment of all is – to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:36-40). We all know this is the greatest commandment. But are we really taking it seriously? It is so easy to think that we are loving Jesus when in reality we are loving something else.

Getting sidetracked

When I was converted at 17 years of age, I had no religious or church background of any kind. Immediately, I fell in love with the Lord Jesus. I began to devour His word. I talked to Him constantly. I witnessed to every one of my non-Christian friends – again and again. I was so overzealous that I lost all but two of my friends. This loss didn't affect me that much because I was so in love with Jesus that nothing else really mattered to me. I also loved my new church. In fact, every time the doors were open I was present.

After about a year, the original passion I had for the Lord Jesus began to fade somewhat. I couldn't point to the day or hour when it happened nor could I give you a reason for it, but something was definitely different. The passion that I had had for Jesus had subtly but surely been transferred to my denomination.

In our church we talked a lot about our denomination and how proud we were of it. It became difficult for me to understand why all true Christians wouldn't want to be a part of my denomination. I also remember thinking that my church was perhaps the best church in the whole denomination. I

don't think that I ever loved my denomination too much nor my church too much. The problem was that I loved Jesus too little in comparison with my church. Deception like this occurs so slowly and is so subtle that it is almost impossible to see while you're trapped by it. Eventually I repented of putting my church ahead of Jesus. The cold self-righteousness left me and I fell in love with Christ afresh.

Later I got sidetracked again in my quest to cultivate passion for the Lord Jesus. In the process of getting theologically trained and becoming a seminary professor, I developed an intense passion for the precise study of the Word of God. Before I knew it, it happened to me again. I found myself loving the Bible more than I loved the Author of the Bible. I was caught in this trap for more years than I like to remember. Again, the problem was not that I loved the Bible too much. It was that I loved Jesus too little in comparison

with the Bible. I had put the Bible over the Lord Jesus, much like the Pharisees had put the law and their traditions above God. It is possible to make this mistake with almost anything. We can put other people or even various forms of ministry – witnessing, caring for the poor, praying for the sick, etc. – above the Lord Jesus Christ. I have often seen people confuse loving Jesus with doing ministry. It's even possible to love the Christian life more than Jesus. There is a sense of security and purpose that comes from being surrounded by Christians and having a lifestyle that our friends approve of. Christian fellowship is wonderful but some have more affection for that than for Jesus himself.

Cultivating passion

More than anything else, passion for the Son of God has to be guarded and cultivated or we will lose it. I find that almost every good thing in my life is all too ready to compete for my time and intimacy with the Son of God.



I have begun praying a prayer that has done more to generate passion in my heart for the Lord Jesus than anything I have ever done before. This prayer is found within what is perhaps the greatest prayer in all of the Bible. I am referring to the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 17. I have turned the last verse of that prayer into my own personalized prayer. "And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26 NKJV)

Jesus said that He had declared the name of the Father to His disciples, that is, He showed them what the Father was like. He did this for one overriding purpose. Jesus wanted His

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disciples to love Him like His heavenly Father loved Him. He wants the love that His Father has for Him to be in His disciples. I read this verse many many times before I really saw it. The first time I actually understood what Jesus was saying I found it difficult to believe. How could I love Jesus like God the Father loves His very own Son? Of course no one can love anyone to the same degree or quality that God loves them. But on the other hand, neither can we be as holy as God, yet God says to us, "You shall be holy for I am holy." It is through the power of His Spirit in us that we can walk in holiness. By that same power, we can live our lives with a consuming passion for our Lord. The Father loves the Son more than anyone or anything else. He is devoted to the Son. His eyes never leave the Son. All that the Father does He does for the Son. Jesus prayed that we would be driven by that same single-eyed passion.

Is obedience enough?

Some people minimize our need for passion for Jesus. They tell us that our feelings aren't really important as long as we walk in obedience. Obedience is wonderful, but the problem with this definition is that you can do the right thing *without loving* the Son of God very much at all. A son can obey his father for reward or for fear of punishment, and actually neither like nor love his father much at all. A husband can be a faithful and kind provider to his wife without having much love or passion for his wife. What wife would settle for a relationship like that? Why do we think God would be willing to settle for an obedience that is not accompanied by a consuming passion for His Son? After all, isn't the greatest commandment to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?

If you look at the heroes of our faith, you'll find that they are men and women who were not only full of good works but were consumed by passion for God. The apostle Paul was so consumed by his affection for the Lord Jesus Christ that he came to the point in his life where living simply meant Christ to him – *"For me, to live is Christ."* (Philippians 1:21 NIV) This kind of complete devotion is meant not only for the apostles.

Martha's sister Mary had this kind of passion for Jesus. She wasn't an apostle or leader, but the Son of God had great prominence in her heart. When Jesus was around she couldn't bear to think of food or any other necessities in life. All she wanted to do was sit at His feet and listen to Him (Luke 10:38 ff). Moreover, Jesus loved being around Mary. When the time for His last Passover drew near and He knew that He only had six days before the cross, where do you think He chose to spend those six days? He went to Mary's house (John 12:1 ff). It's not at all difficult to see what drew Him to Mary's house. While He was there, in the presence of all the disciples, Mary brought out a jar of costly perfume. This perfume probably represented her life savings or her wedding dowry. She broke it and poured it on Jesus. She wasted the most precious possession she had on the Lord Jesus. She did this out of her extravagant affection for Him. She was going to pour out her whole life on the Lord. There was no mediocrity in her feelings for the Him. She was a woman consumed by a holy passion for the Son of God.

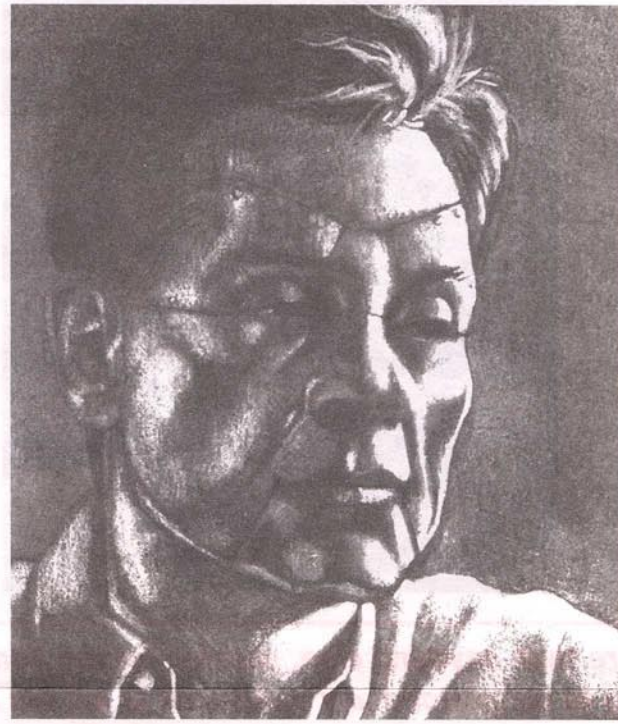
Passion moves Jesus

That passion, however, is a sword that cuts both ways. Jesus also had great affection for Mary. When Mary's brother Lazarus died, Jesus came to their home four days later. Martha was the first to greet the Lord Jesus. She said to Him, *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Jesus responded to

Martha by giving one of the greatest theological teachings in all the Word of God: *"I am the resurrection and the life."* When Mary met the Lord Jesus just a few moments later, she said exactly the same words that Martha said, *"Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died."* (John 11:17-38) However, when Mary said these words, Jesus wept and then He walked to the tomb and raised Mary's brother from the dead. A person like Martha could get a great theological teaching out of Jesus. A person like Mary could break His heart and move Him to raise someone from the dead. People who have Mary's passion for the Lord Jesus can move Him in a way that others can't. How do you get that kind of passionate love for Jesus?

Time to know Him

There are three simple but indispensable things we must do. First, we can't love a person whom we don't know. Therefore, we must set aside time to get to know the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not spend time meditating in His



Word, talking with Him, and listening to Him, we will never progress very far in acquiring passion for Him.

We must set aside a regular time for personal meditation in the scriptures and prayer. We must never allow this time to become mechanical or ritualistic. We must remember that it is possible to read the Bible like a Pharisee and never hear the voice of God (John 5:37). It is possible to let our prayer time degenerate into nothing more than taking a shopping list to God.

In our regular times of personal meditation and prayer we must remind ourselves that the purpose is to meet with a real Person.

This Person speaks, guides, encourages, reveals, convicts, rebukes, discloses himself, hides himself, gets angry, can be grieved, and can rejoice. In that meeting we are capable of making Him angry or making Him rejoice. These are the things that scripture teaches us about the God with whom we relate.

We are taught from the beginning of our conversion about the importance of spending time with Him. The problem isn't that we don't know it, the problem is that we don't do it.

Remove barriers

The second thing that is absolutely essential is the removal of barriers between us and the Lord Jesus. Our sins create a barrier between us and Jesus so that we cannot come into His presence and grow in our love and

knowledge of Him. These barriers are removed when we confess our sins and God forgives us. One of the most important teachings on forgiveness is found in I John 1:9: *"If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* We all know this, but all too often we don't really believe it. It is sinful to live under condemnation and guilt. Too many of us confess sins and never *feel* forgiven because we are really not trusting in the power of His blood to forgive us of those sins. We will never be holy enough, disciplined enough, or anything else enough to get into His presence apart from the blood of His Son. Our good works, reformed lives, and best intentions will never take away the guilt of sin. The only thing that the Father has given us to take away sin and guilt is the blood of His Son.

Ask for passion

The third thing that we must do to acquire passion for the Son of God is to consistently ask for it, to labor for it in prayer. This is where John 17:26 comes in. As I said earlier, I have paraphrased John 17:26 and turned it into my own personal prayer. I pray it like this: "Father, grant me an impartation of the Holy Spirit to love the Son of God like *You* love Him." I pray this in the morning when I get up; I pray it during the day when my mind slips into neutral; and I pray it when I fall asleep at night. My heart has been

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but only the Holy Spirit can change my heart....
Divine love can only be divinely imparted.***

captured by this prayer. When I pray it, I am confessing to God that if He does not grant to me a work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I will never acquire passion for the Son of God. I am confessing to Him that my godliness, my discipline, my knowledge of the Word, though all good, are alone insufficient to produce passion for the Son of God. *I can change my mind, but only the Holy Spirit can change my heart. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to "shed abroad the love of God in our hearts" (Romans 5:5). Divine love can only be divinely imparted.*

Most of my Christian life I've been making the same mistake over and over and over. I keep putting my confidence in my discipline, in my good intentions, in my knowledge of the Bible, in order to produce love for God. I always end up in legalism and self-righteousness when I do this. One day the Lord interrupted all of this. He said to me, "If you ever hear me say to you, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant,' it won't be because you were a good follower, it will be because my Son is a good leader. Put your confidence in His ability to lead, not in your ability to follow."

That divine revelation pierced my heart. I realized why passion-robbing legalism and self-righteousness were able to consistently get such strongholds in my life. I'm not

saying that we don't need discipline, or knowledge of the Bible, or godly behavior - we do. Nor am I saying that we're to be passive and simply let God do it all. I'm talking about our attitude and our confidence. We must do the right things but never put our confidence in our ability to do those things. Our hearts are incredibly prone to deception (Jeremiah 17:9) and our feet are equally prone to wander off the path of righteousness (Romans 3:10 ff). In light of this, how could we trust in our ability to follow Jesus?

I've come to realize that passion for the Son of God can't be earned. It comes because He gives it as His greatest and most gracious gift. And after all, isn't that how the greatest things come to us, as gifts? James says, *"You have not because you ask not."* (James 4:2) The greatest gifts that God has to give us are ours for the asking. I encourage you, from this day forward, to spend more time in your prayer life asking God to grant you passion for the Son of God than you do asking Him for anything else. Our confidence must always be in His willingness and ability to impart to us passion for his Son.

If you begin to pray this prayer on a regular basis, passion for the Son of God will begin to permeate your heart. It may take you months, even years, before you notice a significant difference. In fact, you will probably never be able to point to the day or the hour when you began to be consumed with passion for the Son of God, but others will notice. They'll say

you've changed; you seem different. They'll say there's a kindness, a gentleness in you they hadn't noticed before. There's an infectious quality in your love for the Son of God that didn't seem to be there before, and they'll want to know what you've been doing.

Don't be passive about acquiring passion for the Son of God. Make it the focus of your life. Put your eyes on the Son of God and leave them there (Hebrews 12:1 ff), and you will find yourself becoming like Him. You'll find yourself falling in love with Him as you ask God day after day to consume you with passion for His glorious Son. And that passion, as it begins to occupy your heart, will conquer a thousand sins in your life. You will begin to love what He loves and hate what He hates.

The best friends of Jesus

Among the women in the Bible, I think that Mary is the one who most exemplifies this passion for the Son of God. Among the men, it would have to be the apostle John. John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The Living Bible refers to John as "Jesus' closest friend." (John 13:23). That's a great translation. I love it. John was always the one of the three disciples that was permitted to be on the "inside," but of the three, he was the closest to Jesus and everyone knew it.