

Volume II: CRISIS

6) *The Greatest Crisis of All*

7) *Why Don't We Hope?*

8) *Why Don't We Care?*

Interlude II



8

WHY DON'T WE CARE?

The Crisis of Supremacy and the Loss of *Passion*

Before Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492, his country's national motto was "Ne Plus Ultra", meaning "There is nothing beyond". In one sense this was a boast. Spain considered itself superior to other European nations. In another sense it was a vision. In its own estimation Spain occupied the very ends of the earth. Geographically speaking, Spain was as far as any traveler would ever dare to go.

After the explorer returned with glowing reports of bountiful lands, the motto was revised to "Plus Ultra" meaning "There is something beyond". Spain's confession? "There is something more waiting for you across the Atlantic. There are promised treasures beyond what our nation can give you." Intriguing, global-sized prospects turned Spain (and later a whole continent) toward the pursuit of New World wonders. We might say that hope "converted" them. It moved them beyond their shores. It incited in them a *passion* that resulted in centuries of adventures and discoveries.

There's no place for "Ne Plus Ultra" in our union with Christ, either. There's no reason to settle for dreary, truncated visions of Kingdom prospects. We must refuse to set boundaries on what we expect Jesus to be

for us or to do through us. We must cease acting like “flat-landers” and venture forth to become “round-earthers” (like Columbus) living by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5), focused on which others may not yet see: the consummation of all things in Him. God’s great salvation inspires us to pursue possibilities beyond the horizon of human heartaches. It invites us to go after eternal treasures surpassing even our current experiences of the Kingdom. Daily we need to ask God to reveal to us through His Word “great and unsearchable things which you have not yet known” (Jer. 33). Our cry should be: Lord Jesus, take us with you on the jubilant journey that explores blessings “exceedingly above and beyond all that we ask or even imagine” (Eph. 3).

The supremacy of Christ promises every disciple “Plus Ultra!” It calls us to renounce “pea-sized” expectations toward Him as well as “down-sized” affections for Him. Soren Kierkegaard said it well: “Hope [in Christ] becomes a passion for the possible.”

In the last chapter we asked a question every human being must face: “What may I hope?” What really lies beyond the horizon? In this chapter we examine struggles to “set sail”. More specifically: What does it take to increase a passion to pursue the full extent of Christ’s supremacy? And above all: Why do so many in the Church seem to care so little about the glory of God’s Son or the advance of His Kingdom, especially by what they seek (pray) and what they speak?

We’ll consider:

- **The relationship between conversion, hope and passion.**
 - **Four ways passion for Christ loses its punch for many of us.**
 - **Why the loss of passion is often due to short-sighted messages about Christ.**
 - **How facing this loss can help us effectively confront and cure the crisis of supremacy.**
 - **The possibilities for recovering passion for Christ through a “Campaign of Hope”.**
-

Conversion and Passion

(Acts 26:15-19)

Conversion turns sinners into “round-earthers”. Conversion involves a *turning from* everything false and illusionary while *turning toward* Christ and the dependable promises His supremacy offers. In fact, what lies *outside* ourselves forms the main motivation for every Christian’s commitment to Christ. *Outside* we are welcomed into intimate encounters with His redeeming reign, on many fronts. *Outside* we are beckoned by Him into victories so vital we must reject anything that might deflect, defy, or diminish the Victor’s role in our lives. More specifically, *outside* there awaits us (as outlined in chapter 1) the sum total of His glory — the focus (who He is), fulfillment (where He leads), fullness (how He imparts), and fervency (what He receives) of His supremacy.

We mustn’t confuse conversion with the Biblical doctrine of *regeneration*. Regeneration is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3) exercised even when we are dead in our sin (Eph. 2). By contrast conversion marks our *response* to God’s regenerating work in us. It answers the question: “How does hope express itself primarily?” You could say conversion is hope in action. Conversion is how I cultivate and nurture the hope in Christ the Spirit has already placed within me. Conversion is “hope with a passion”. Passion describes how we care about that hope. Passion causes us to “set sail”.

THINK WITH ME ...

What three essential choices in conversion are fundamental to Christian passion?

Allow me to be personal for a moment. My new life with God’s Son began the year I turned eighteen. The Spirit tapped a couple of zealous Christian students in my dorm at college to take me on. So for three months during my freshman year they shared the Gospel with me almost daily. Of course, I made sure to show them little outward interest. But gradually they got

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The Person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception.... I felt an ardency of soul to be what I know not otherwise how to express: emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone .

(JONATHAN EDWARDS)

through. On autumn afternoons I would retreat to a graveyard near campus to wander and wonder. I challenged God earnestly (even out loud, at times) about His Word — about His promises in Christ and their implications for me. Instinctively I dreaded the direction those truths might take me. I feared the future they might foster for me. I resented the passion they might require of me. Finally the Scriptures overcame the stranglehold of my prideful unbelief. The Spirit by the Word convinced me that life in Jesus, as offered in the Gospel, held out infinitely more than life without Him.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Without a doubt there comes to many of us the choice between a life of contraction and one of expansion; a life of small dimensions and one of widening horizons and larger visions and plans; a life of self-satisfaction or self seeking, or one of unselfish or truly Christ-like sharing.

(DR. JOHN R. MOTT)

That's when it happened. As I sat on the edge of a tombstone in a 200-year-old cemetery to watch the sun set one November afternoon, it was *hope* — the offer of an eternal hope anchored in a supreme Savior — that converted me. There among the graves I not only entered the Empire of the Son but also the *future* of the Son! Peter affirms that I was “born again into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1). I sometimes say to people: “I came alive among the dead!”

That afternoon conversion required of me three simultaneous choices (which I only vaguely understood at the time). Each choice continues to stoke the fires of devotion for my Savior:

- 1) *I chose to turn from sin and self as my identity and my destiny.* From that day and forever I would never, ever again define myself apart from Christ. I refused then — and do so now — to stay inside myself separated from the God who made me, doomed to everlasting death (Rom. 6). I ceased justifying my need for any *identity* based on my own goodness and righteousness. I ceased orchestrating a *destiny* ordered by my own ingenuity, my control on events, my self-absorbed dreams and plans, my assumed abilities to fulfill them or my persuasive powers of positive thinking. The Spirit convinced me that left to myself I could anticipate nothing but the “same-old/same-old”: forever falling short of the glory of God and the promises of His Kingdom (Rom. 3). I wanted no part of that scenario any longer. And I still don't.

- 2) *I chose, at the same time, to turn toward Christ as my identity.* This meant that in breaking free of sin and self I would forever seek to define myself in four primary ways: The grandeur of Christ's glory, the testimony of His triumphs, the riches of His grace and my service to His Kingdom. My life became forever interpreted by who Christ is as God's Son (focus), where He leads in God's purposes (fulfillment), how He imparts God's resources (fullness) and what He receives from the God's people (fervency).
- 3) *At the same time, I turned to Christ as my destiny.* My future became eternally wrapped up in His risen life at the right hand of the Father. Now, every prospect I could claim would spring from His righteousness, His wisdom, His plans, His abilities, His Kingdom, as well as His designs on the future and His powers to get us there together. I chose that day — and each day since — to follow the One who alone guarantees for me all of God's promises. He is my assurance about glorious things to come (Col. 1 and 3). I can truly say at that momentous hour I was converted *in* hope and *by* hope.

This isn't just my story. Whether or not one can fully grasp all its dimensions, the moment Christian conversion takes place this is how salvation unfolds — incorporating these three choices — for every believer, including you.

As for you it was for me: That first moment of decision wasn't the last time I faced these issues. Conversion is more than a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Conversion is an all-through-your-life adventure where we constantly choose to build our lives on an identity and a destiny rooted in the hope that Christ and His Kingdom gives us. Since I first emerged from that graveyard, conversion has remained a *process*, a daily embrace of God's promises about my identity and destiny. Conversion ushers me into a life of constant *caring* about the supremacy of God's Son as I give "my utmost for His highest", to use Oswald Chambers' phrase.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The Gospel-centered community continually encounters and celebrates Christ. Thus, the heart of the Church's evangelistic ministry is its own *continuing conversion to the fullness of Christ and His mission. The continual conversion of the Church happens as the congregation hears, responds to and obeys the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ever-new and more comprehensive ways.*

(DR. DARRELL GUDER)

THINK WITH ME ...**Why does a life of *continual* conversion prevent a loss of passion?**

Let's remind ourselves that even the Protestant Reformation emphasized the need to see conversion as a process. It stated that the Church, once reformed, must *keep on being reformed* by the message of Christ. In a similar vein Luther spoke of *repentance* (forsaking sin and choosing to return to Christ as our only hope) as a *practice*, as a way to follow the Lord faithfully every single day. As 17th century Puritans emphasized, we must be both "converted and *always converting*".

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

Surely Christ beckons us to repent of hearts that see Him so small that we think our works enrich Him, our programs support Him, our lives are indispensable to His plan. To see Him move and work in power for His name's sake must become our consuming passion, deepening and intensifying as His Spirit takes control of our hearts. Let us settle for nothing less than the explosive inhabitation of the living Lord.

(TRICIA RHODES)

Followers of the Savior understand that conversion involves more than adopting proper doctrinal codes. It also implies on-going growth in one's affections for Him as well as allegiance to His Kingdom, all based on God's promises to us in Christ. That kind of Gospel inflames attitudes, motivations, relationships, priorities — above all, our worship of the living God. It becomes a *prelude* to consistent zeal for Jesus' glory that lasts long after initial commitments are made.

Even Timothy, Paul's protégé, needed from time to time to "fan into flame" God's call on his life (2 Tim. 1). The apostle pressed this dedicated pastor to intensify his hope-filled ambitions for the work of the Lord. Paul taught Timothy to be more like a soldier concentrating on victory in battle; or an athlete set on winning a race; or a farmer energetically tending his field in full assurance of harvest (2 Tim. 2). At the same time, he challenged him to proclaim this same

hope to other believers, especially when faced with their indifference or opposition (2 Tim. 4). Paul urged Timothy to stay vigilant about maintaining his own passion for Christ, never falling short of what God's promises were meant to inspire in him, while keeping his hearers looking upward and outward as well (2 Tim. 4).

Timothy is not an isolated case. From time to time all Christians need to be re-awakened to our identity and destiny in Christ and His glorious reign.

We all need to re-ignite the passion that hope deserves. A process of *continuous* conversion must mark us if we're to help cure the current crisis of supremacy.

THINK WITH ME ...

How would John Wesley confront a loss of passion?

In 2003, 30 million Methodists worldwide celebrated the 300th birthday of John Wesley, a prime spark in the First and Second Great Awakenings in the 1700's. In 1739 Wesley took to the open fields in Bristol, England, to preach to multitudes of "churched" Anglicans about their need to be re-converted to Christ. Then he formed them into support groups called "classes" to hammer-out their new found life in His Kingdom.

Wesley never let up. During four decades on over 70 mission trips he crisscrossed the whole of England, Ireland and Scotland by horseback. In the process he lobbied for the poor and used profits from the sale of his many books to support various charitable causes such as health clinics. He translated works from Greek and Hebrew, wrote a history of the Church, produced a library of Biblical commentaries, compiled an English dictionary and published 23 collections of hymns. His *Journals* still are read eagerly worldwide. Eventually Wesley's efforts resulted in a revival movement that has now penetrated nearly every nation on earth. The hope he proclaimed (about which his brother Charles wrote hundreds of hymns) ignited new levels of passion for God's Son, not among pagans first of all but rather among struggling *believers*.

As Wesley understood, at its heart every God-given revival, whether personal or corporate, starts with the *re*-evangelization of God's people. Christians are invited into fresh encounters with the Christ of the gospel. They are encouraged to re-engage with Him once again around the full implications of His lordship. So to speak, revival is a "re-conversion". The Holy Spirit persuades us to get passionate all over again about God's Son and the great hope of our salvation. We start to care again about the issues that touch His supremacy in our lives and among the nations.

Frequently, when the Spirit resurrects fresh zeal for the Savior, an equally useful phrase to describe the phenomenon is *spiritual awakening* (the response that Wesley's hearers vividly illustrated). Isaiah invites believers to "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.... Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

There have always been prophetic voices within the Church that have summoned her to conversion ... to that transformation which results from the renewing of our understanding of the Gospel and its claim on us.

(DR. DARRELL GRUDER)

your dawn” (Isa. 60). Christians are admonished in Scripture to “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Eph. 5). It was the church in Rome that required Paul’s exhortation: “The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13). More recently George MacDonald caught the essence of such verses when he wrote: “We must wake our souls unnumbered times a day and urge ourselves to live with a holy greed ... athirst and empty, for God’s breath to fill.”

When Christians wake up to the glory of Christ, important changes ensue. We shake off the soothing slumber of the status quo. We rise up once more to pursue wholeheartedly Christ and His global cause in the full light of His Day. Dispelling fears of fanaticism, we foster a fervency toward Christ for *all* that He is and *all* that He is up to. We start to care about Him.

When Passion Loses Its Punch

(Luke 24:13-32)

The Church’s perennial need for spiritual awakening warns us, however, that passion for Christ’s Kingdom can peter out. Like chewing gum, it can lose its flavor. Like an airplane in the midst of a steep climb, it can stall. Not just sometimes. Frankly, too many times. This can become the experience of His most devoted followers. It’s a daily battle for all of us.

THINK WITH ME ...

How do life experiences fight against our fervency for Christ?

In the most surprising ways we may find ourselves reflected in the mood of the disciples walking the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24). Just as the crucifixion weighed on their spirits, circumstances beyond our control as well as life’s disappointing outcomes can unsettle us. To our dismay we feel helpless and

hopeless, desperate to reclaim the devotion we once held toward our Lord. There seems to be nowhere to turn. We wonder how to rekindle the fervor. We fret over how to care more deeply about God's eternal purposes in Jesus. Setbacks tempt us to replace passion with resignation.

Not long ago a nationally respected Christian leader, someone who for years has incited wholehearted obedience to God's Son among thousands, faced the hopeless prospects of aggressive cancer. After months of gradual and painful physical decline, discouragement began to overwhelm him. Writing to his many prayer partners, he confessed: "I have never experienced a mental battle like what I've lived through these last months. It becomes easier to give up with each passing day. To those who ask about my health, I can so quickly give in to reciting a litany of my physical afflictions." Then, his letter urged readers to pray for him what Jesus prayed for Peter in a time of trial: "I pray for you that your faith will not fail" (Lk 22). Although the Holy Spirit had kept my friend in "forward motion" most of his life, now he was tempted to procrastinate pursuing a relationship with the Lord Jesus any further. He found himself protesting to God, "Not right now. Later. I'll seek You again when I feel better. Let me wait until I'm back on my feet."

I'm grateful for his candor. For any Christian inexplicable suffering can cut into our caring about the Kingdom. In seasons of sickness especially, fervency for Christ's supremacy can fade long before the body does. But it need not be so. Listen to this godly leader as he concluded his letter:

"But in the midst of this battle, my wonderful Lord challenged me with these words: 'Now is the time. You have a choice to choose. Without any immediate feelings of glorious rapture for Me, you can choose right now to proclaim My wonders anyway, instead of focusing on your sufferings.'" This insight was the turning point for my friend. His letter was the first step toward embracing Christ wholeheartedly once again. As a result, passion of a more profound sort unlike anything he had ever known began to penetrate his heart. That's why he wrapped up his report with stirring words from 2 Timothy (written, as we know, by another who chose proclaiming over complaining): "The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength for the sake of the message of Christ" (4:17). Like Paul, this disciple had found true victory.

Of course, it isn't always suffering that dampens enthusiasm for the King. Brennan Manning tells of a Stanford University professor's confession that the pressures of her job on campus seemed to "conspire to deplete any

passion for Christ". As she put it to one friend: "Once the fire of Christ burned inside of me. But slowly, almost imperceptibly, I stopped sitting at the fireplace. Instead, my job became all-consuming. I'm like Mary Magdalene in the garden, crying: 'Where has my Beloved gone?'"

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Very few American Christians have experienced a sense of spiritual brokenness that compelled them to beg God for His mercy and acceptance through the love of Christ. We have a nation of "Christians" who took the best offer, but relatively few who were so humiliated and hopeless before a holy and omnipotent God that they cried out for undeserved compassion. That helps to explain why in practical terms it's hard to tell the difference between those who have beliefs that characterize them as born again and those who don't.

(DR. GEORGE BARNIA)

It appears she is not alone. Many of us are similarly depleted. Looking in all the wrong places, our search for success frequently deflates devotion for the One whose dominion alone can assure success the way God measures it. A poll by the Barna Research Group asked Americans what they believed was necessary for them to have a successful life. Health? Happy children? Occupational achievements? Only one out of every fourteen adults said that anything related to spirituality or faith in Christ would help achieve what they might term "success". Is it any wonder many Christians have lost their passion for Him?

There are additional fronts in the fight to find renewed fervency for God's Son. Each reflects the impact of a prior shortage of hope in Christ for ALL that He is. Four are so critical we need to examine them right here.

THINK WITH ME ...

How does sin suffocate passion for Christ and His supremacy?

At its core every sin is an act of rebellion. No sin is insignificant because all sin is measured by the sovereignty of the One it offends. His dignity determines that our depravity is nothing less than *treason*. Whether overt or covert, sin is an attempt to dethrone the Lord of Glory and enthrone ourselves in His place as masters of our fate. This is just as true of sin in a believer as it is in an unbeliever.

Some sins consist of a "yes" to God's "no" — our attempt to breach the boundaries He set for the subjects of the King as we assert our own invalid rights "to rule". Even more damaging, many sins, especially for a believer, consist of our "no" to God's "yes" — our refusal to receive the riches of His

grace because that might require us to crown the Son in a submission we're not ready to give Him.

When *unbelievers* set their passions on temporal things; when they withhold their affections from the God who made them; when they embrace darkness over Light while dismissing the supreme rights of the One who alone can save them (Jn. 3), in His just wrath the Lord of Heaven and earth gives them over to "sinful desires". He allows them to be possessed with "shameful lusts" that ultimately destroy any capacity they may have to worship and adore the King of the Universe (Rom. 1).

It should come as no surprise, then, that sin exacts no small toll on a *believer's* heart as well.

Maybe we're *refusing* Him. Maybe we're *using* Him. But every sin results in *defusing* Him as it waters down a disciple's vision of who He really is and causes zeal for Him to lose its zip and zest.

Simply put: Fleshly sin and godly passions cannot peacefully co-exist in a redeemed soul. The flesh and the Spirit are always at war (Gal. 5). Christians are sowing either to the Spirit or to the flesh (Gal. 6). The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ more glorious to His followers (John 16; Eph 1 and 3); to manifest His lordship through our lives (Acts 1 and 2; Romans 8); to empower our acts of love for Him (1 Cor. 12; 1 Thess. 1); and to increase our hope in Him (Rom. 15; 1 Jn. 3). Since the effect of sin in a Christian's life is to grieve the Spirit (Eph. 5), and quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5), and resist the Spirit (Acts 7), and insult the Spirit (Heb. 10), then it follows necessarily: Sin suffocates a Spirit-ignited savoring of the Son every time. Knowing this, Paul urges: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.... Understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs ... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5).

There is one sin in particular that soundly destroys devotion for Jesus among believers: It's the spiritual scourge of *presumption*. Presumption involves a self-congratulatory, self-absorbed approach to discipleship that concludes what we already have is all there is, or at least all we really need.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

I must surrender my fascination with myself to a more worthy pre-occupation with the character and purposes of Christ. I am not the point. He is. I exist for Him. He does not exist for me. Is there a passion to be consumed with the work of Christ, a passion to know Him as Lord?

(DR. LARRY CRABB)

The church in Sardis boasted a reputation of being alive, but Jesus told them “you are dead” and in need to “wake up and strengthen what remains” (Rev. 3). The church in Laodicea (Rev. 3) protested, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”. Their self-deception ignored the truth of how “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” they truly were, especially compared to the One confronting them as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation” (all titles of royalty, by the way). In their self-enclosed smugness they discounted the supremacy of their Savior. They ignored Him while at the same time they trumpeted their own supposed accomplishments for Him. Standing outside their feeble fellowship, Jesus warned them: “You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! You are *lukewarm*! Therefore, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

Wherever arrogance arises among the saints, ardor atrophies. The only path back to spiritual fervor, Jesus told these two congregations, was to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” about His eschatological glory (the theme of the entire book of Revelation). So it is in every generation: Christ’s knock lands on doors shut tightly by self-satisfaction. With urgency He invites us to open up, to gaze on Him again for *all* that He is, to awaken

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Jesus is my God, Jesus is my Spouse, Jesus is my Life. Jesus is my only Love, Jesus is my All, Jesus is my Everything. Because of this I am never afraid. I am doing my work with Jesus. I am doing it for Jesus. I’m doing it to Jesus; therefore, the results are His, not mine.

(MOTHER THERESA)

to more of what He could be in us and through us, so that we might join Him back on His throne (which, hopefully, some in Laodicea finally did — see the last verses of Rev. 3). He wants us “*hot*” for the honor of His Highness and inflamed to serve the full implications of His everlasting reign.

When because of its perceived benefits preoccupation with maintaining the status quo distracts our delight in the Beneficiary; when the proliferation of religious achievements becomes more alluring than the Promised One in whom the Father has accomplished everything for us; when our churchly goals are less for Christ’s acclaim than for the reputation of our own denomina-

tional name, we are in trouble. Hearts burning for “things above where Christ sits” (Col. 3) soon give way to lukewarm love for the Lord, a condition for which He has no more use than you or I have for tepid soup (Rev. 3).

THINK WITH ME ...**Why would Christians *fear* a passion for Christ's supremacy?**

The presumption found in “religious flesh” isn't the only culprit that suffocates Christian passion. For others it may be *fear* — a “dis-ease” about opening the door and letting His lordship have the full run of the house.

Not long ago a major Christian consulting firm was asked to research the level of spiritual growth within one of the larger evangelical churches in America. Using an exhaustive questionnaire plus in-depth interviews with elders and teachers, the consultants uncovered significant shortfalls in the vision of many members. Later, after reading the report, one of the elders said, “I am in tears.”

What was discovered? The primary reason members gave for attending this body was to find *safety* from the negative influences of the larger culture. They demanded refuge from the ungodly forces threatening their families. But they confessed something else: Despite how much they enjoyed increasing their intellectual grasp on the Bible, surprisingly *they admitted to a prevailing fear of intimacy with the Christ of the Bible*. They dreaded the “risk” of getting too personal with Him. A majority said they wanted to be cared for and provided for by God — and that they were grateful for all Jesus had done for them. But they indicated significant discomfort with the idea of God taking them deeper in their walk with the Savior.

This is evidence of the greater tragedy: That congregation was suffering one form of the crisis of supremacy. Many members needed to be re-introduced to the *real* Jesus for *all* that He is. It is unfortunate that this is typical of thousands of other churches involving millions of believers. How many of us, in fact, rest easy with Biblical prospects of on-going encounters with our Savior as all-consuming Lord of Hosts? How many of us are secretly apprehensive about ever beholding His regal glory *up close and personal*?

We can find some comfort, at least, in knowing even the apostle John had to face a similar fear. John's original love for his Master was so intensely intimate that he concluded his Gospel by suggesting that were he

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Overall, Christian ministry is stuck in a deep rut. Too many Christians and churches in America have traded in spiritual passion for empty rituals, clever methods and mindless practices. The challenge to today's Church is not methodological. It is a challenge to resuscitate the spiritual passion and fervor of the nation's Christians.

(DR. GEORGE BARNA)

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

Desire often feels like an enemy, because it wakes longings that cannot be fulfilled in the moment ... Passion means to suffer. That is why many Christians are reluctant to listen to their hearts: they know that their dullness is keeping them from feeling the pain of life. Many of us have chosen simply not to want so much; it's safer that way. It's also godless.

(DR. JOHN ELDRIDGE)

to write down everything he personally knew about Him, the libraries of the world might not be able to contain all the books (Jn. 21). Yet, this very same John froze with fear when Jesus displayed to him a much fuller revelation of His supremacy on the Island of Patmos. Beholding Him enveloped in eschatological brilliance, the disciple lost every ounce of courage. He fell prostrate on the ground, barely able to breathe. For a moment even John experienced a “crisis of supremacy”.

Instantly, however, his Savior reassured him with words conveying great hope. In essence He said to him (paraphrased): “There’s no reason for fear. Get up. Gaze unhesitatingly at My magnificence. Take stock of the death I’ve defeated, the keys of power I hold, the vision for the future I embody. Then write it all down so that every

other believer can see what you see. They too can triumph over fear with the wonder of *all* that I Am.” As the rest of Revelation confirms, John was immediately back in the business of serving His Lord with a sense of destiny he had not known before.

THINK WITH ME ...
What primary fears often restrict passion for Christ and His supremacy?

Fears can provide faithful barometers on how seriously we have disconnected from the truth about God’s grace and glory in Jesus. For myself there are three major fears I’ve had to confront. Time and time again they have resurfaced in my struggles to rebuild a more passion-driven (rather than panic-driven) discipleship:

 1) *The fear that He WON’T.*

This is the fear that Christ will *not* want to break through for me in the ways His supremacy promises, thus leaving me confused, or disillusioned, or heavy-hearted, or ashamed. *I fear the potential failure* of ever experiencing His supremacy in *my* life.

2) *The fear that He WILL.*

This is the opposite fear, that Christ *will* want to break through for me in the ways His supremacy promises. The whole idea of intimate encounters with Him feels unpredictable, disruptive, uncomfortable and, most of all, costly. What if, when He draws near, He exposes me for who I really am? What if He takes me where I've never gone before? *I fear the potential success* of His supremacy manifested in my life.

3) *The fear that I CAN'T.*

No matter how powerfully or prosperously Christ's supremacy may break through for me, I dread the level of obedience He will expect of me as a result. I'm apprehensive that the action steps this will require of me will go beyond my ability to please Him. *I fear the potential demands* His supremacy will make of my life, because I feel impotent to respond as fully as my King deserves.

However, there's good news for all who struggle with such fears. What God did for John (and more recently has brought to bear on my life) He is willing to do for any Christian. Grace can effectively challenge every "crisis of supremacy" (exhibited in part by each fear above) as the Spirit unveils more of the *truth* in Jesus. We rise with renewed expectations and holy ambitions toward our King. As He did for John, the Spirit can convince us that every promise of Jesus' reign will be accomplished without fail; that every demonstration of His reign will apply only God's best to us; that every demand of His reign will be underwritten by His power and resources.

The Father wants us to revel daily in the preeminence of His Son. He invites us to do so right now in ways reflective of how we will celebrate Him in the blaze of His Eternal Dominion. In light of a *full expectation* of that Final Moment, He urges us in this present moment to abandon ourselves wholeheartedly to obedience to Christ. In the Day of Glory all believers (including John) will prostrate themselves before the Throne, not from terror but out of sheer unbounded adoration for the Lamb, we will

QUOTABLE QUOTE

If, therefore, all things are put under Christ with the exception of Him who put them under Him, the Son is Lord of all, and the Father is Lord of Him. There is one God, to whom all things are made subject together with Christ, to whom the Father has made all things subject—with the exception of Himself.

(HIPPLYTUS — CHURCH FATHER AND MARTYR, C. 205)

be filled forever with unfettered fervency for His magnificent supremacy (Rev. 5). In greater measure than we have yet known that experience can become much more ours even today.

Passion is God's gift to us. Any child of His can become passion-driven to the degree he allows himself to be *Person*-driven, reassured by a hope shaped around Christ for *all* that He is.

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense is a loss of passion a result of “spiritual warfare”?

Even those already on fire for Christ are not quite out of the woods, however. Passion untouched by sin or fear can still come under siege from another camp. Our enemy prowls near every believer who is motivated by a righteous resolve to follow the Redeemer. This opponent is diametrically opposed to Christ's message of hope and the passion it inspires in us. He is ready to devour any who would embrace either (1 Pet. 5).

At the minimum Satan is determined to *distract* us from God's promises by *diverting* whatever hope we have in Christ into a myriad of empty enticements. He wants to *diffuse* our affections for the Son, to *douse* any flicker of passion he uncovers that might move us to pursue God's Son more intentionally (2 Pet. 2, 3).

But the conflict goes deeper. Forces of darkness love to fabricate thick barriers against fresh revelations of the character and Kingdom of Jesus. Inside the church in Corinth, for example, Paul identified “strongholds” of deception that obscured their growth in the knowledge of God's glory. False teachers had discouraged the believers' surrender to Jesus as exclusive Lord (2 Cor. 10). Paul claimed this activity was a result of Satan's doing everything he could to draw Christians away from pure, undistracted devotion to Jesus. Satan's goal was to enslave them to counterfeit gospels, creating in them a crisis of supremacy. In turn it was the believers' duty — one of their most effective tactics — to stay on the alert. They needed to be ready to oppose the enemy with the truth about the Lord at every opportunity, “bringing every thought into obedience to Christ” (2 Cor. 11)

Mark this clearly (because the Devil does!): The capstone of the Consummation just ahead of us will involve a chorus of consuming passion for Christ, swelling forever from the saints in Glory. Therefore it follows: If we intend to conquer for the Lamb in *this* world, between now and then

our ardent affections for Him, amplified with pulsating praises, must increasingly dominate us each day we walk with Him. Our passion for Jesus (which actually starts, as we saw in chapter 5, with *His* passion for us) is where all evil powers will firmly and fully meet their demise at the End. We can be thankful that to significant measure this can happen even now as we make His supremacy our identity (compare Eph. 6:10-20 with Rev. 19:11-16).

THINK WITH ME ...

What overriding *disconnect* often triggers our loss of passion?

But there's one more reason for the depletion of passion for Christ among evangelicals: *the profound disconnect between the Biblical vision of Christ and that which is promoted in many of our churches.*

This phenomenon helps explain how sin and fear and Satan can get footholds in our lives and sabotage our zeal. For many of us the disconnect began the very hour of our initial conversion. It was in the DNA of the kind of gospel that came to us. The initial truth we believed too often lacked much of what this *Joyful Manifesto* has sought to recover. The full extent of Christ's gracious reign was somehow never heard — maybe never spoken.

Here's my point: Current inability to sustain fervency for Christ and His Kingdom are due more often than not to the *impoverished content* of the good news that brought us to Him in the first place. It simply was not comprehensive enough. Self-serving proclamations, however well-intended, diminished our view of the fuller implications of His lordship. Shortsighted testimonies about His Kingdom distorted our view of, and dampened enthusiasm for, the role we must play to advance His cause among the nations.

To restore passion to multitudes of Christians, it's time for spiritual leaders to tackle head on the deficiencies in our teachings about hope in Jesus. It's time to develop effective ways to get the *caring* back into our *calling* as God's people. We

QUOTABLE QUOTE

My view of the work of Christ was severely limited. It wasn't that I didn't believe the right truth. I simply didn't understand how far-reaching and all-inclusive the work of Christ really was. When I discovered the universal and cosmic nature of the work of Christ, it was like being born again. I was given a key to a Christian way of viewing the whole world, a key that unlocked the door to a rich storehouse of spiritual treasures, treasures that I am still handling in sheer amazement.

(DR. ROBERT WEBBER)

must not delay. Otherwise, the impoverished vision of Him we suffer will continue to sap vitality out of the Church's fervency for His supremacy.

A Loss of Passion Due to Shortsighted Messages about Christ

(2 Timothy 4:1-5)

Reviewing recent reports by Gallup, Barna and others on Christian perspectives in America, one could argue easily that a loss of passion has overtaken millions of believers. The truth about Christ and His supremacy is simply not getting through to us. A case in point: 20% who call themselves "born again" still believe in reincarnation, as do 26% in astrology, 45% in human potential for getting into heaven and 25% in communicating with the dead. Chuck Colson describes this as "salad-bar Christianity", mixing up so many other agendas with the lordship of Christ that many are no longer moved by Jesus' call to follow Him exclusively. Their passions are set on other things besides the glory of God's Son.

Looking at this current condition, some have proposed (humorously) that we rename great old hymns of the Church to reflect our trivialization of the Glad Tidings. For example: "I Surrender Some", "Fill My Spoon, Lord", "Take My Life and Let Me Be", "I Love To Talk About Telling The Story", or (my favorite) "Oh, How I *Like* Jesus".

If you ask Christians, "How *strong* is your passion for Christ?" primarily you are asking, "How compelling was the *message* of Christ you first heard and received?" That is parallel to asking them, "How *big* was the hope in Christ to which that message pointed you?"

Did the message you heard at the beginning of your walk with Jesus captivate you with the righteous reign of Jesus, both for you and for nations? Or was it more about the possibilities of personal fulfillment through the addition of a Savior to your life? Was the message primarily focused on *Kingdom* prospects, or more on enhancing *immediate* prospects? Did it announce to you a supreme Lord in whom everything in Heaven and on earth is to be consummated, who therefore has every right to consummate your life in Himself and His purposes? Or was the offer more akin to exciting news

about a good God who was ready to help you get a good life with Christ available where needed?

For many the message seemed only to promise: “*God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life in Jesus*” — which is a genuinely happy hope! And entirely true! But this offer that speaks more to the *centrality* of Jesus must be incorporated into a grander invitation, one that addresses the *supremacy* of Jesus. An attending announcement might sound something like this:

*God has a wonderful plan to sum up all
things under His Son as Lord
and to glorify His name among the
nations for all ages to come.
And, He loves you enough to give
you a strategic place in it.*

The first offer (improperly interpreted by many as a “me-centered” message) has been separated too often from the second (which is overwhelmingly, unavoidably a message about the preeminence of Someone Else). Plainly, the first offer is not the final word God intends for us. Unless it is coupled with the second, it can end up inadvertently fostering both a hope that is hollow and a passion that is shallow.

Tragically, the Gospel embraced by a multitude of Christians today appears to have been truncated (“dumbed-down” some have said) in order to make it more palatable, less demanding, more manageable, less costly, more pragmatic for meeting daily needs. Why don't we *care* about the things of Christ as the New Testament calls us to do? Here's a big part of the answer.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

At heart, Boomers are consumers. The way we presented Christ to most Boomers struck a resonant chord with them from that mindset. We told them all they had to do was say a prayer admitting they made some mistakes, they're sorry and they want to be forgiven. Boomers weighed the downside — which really amounted to nothing more than a one-time admission of imperfection and weakness in return for permanent peace with God — and figured it was a no-brainer, a can't-lose transaction. The consequence has been millions of Boomers who said the prayer, asked for forgiveness and went on with their life, with virtually nothing changed.

(DR. GEORGE BARNA)

THINK WITH ME ...**How need-centered is the message about Christ most Christians have heard?**

A colleague recently related that a pastor friend of his, anxious to reach a widely unchurched community, set about advertising a series of sermons with catchy titles like “Making A Living or A Life?”; “Redefining Success On The Job”;

QUOTABLE QUOTE

All of us who preach the gospel, I suppose, desire men’s conversion. Many, no doubt, are concerned also to glorify God by a faithful declaration of his truth. But how many, when preaching the gospel, are consumed by the longing to magnify Christ — to extol the richness, freedom, and glory of his grace and the perfection of His saving work? The cheap and perfunctory way in which the person of the Savior is sometimes dealt with in modern evangelistic preaching forces this question upon us ... (we must be) concerned above all things to honor Christ: to show his glory to needy men and women ... to recover the over-mastering concern to exalt this mighty Savior.

(DR. J.I. PACKER)

“How Much Is Enough?”; and “How To Have A Happy Marriage”. This pastor justified his subject matter as a way to appeal to people’s search for happiness so that he could show them how “finding Christ brings true happiness” (which is true, of course, as far as it goes). Then my friend, who is a published theologian and was involved in parish ministry for 20 years, made this thought-provoking observation: “He’s not actually preaching *Christ* in the best sense. He’s got the *message* we’re to bring confused with the *fruits* it’s supposed to produce. Unwittingly he’s delivering sermons bent toward what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once called ‘cheap grace’. We must never forget [my friend concluded] that the message you use to *win them* is the same message you then must use to *keep them*.”

Studies estimate that nearly every Sunday morning a majority of sermons heard across America are centered on daily survival issues rather than Christ’s Kingdom issues. Too frequently we evangelicals propagate among ourselves a gospel that fails to get beyond immediate remedies for hurting hearts, or failing families, or troubled communities. Too infrequently do our messages summon hearers to passionately pursue Christ Himself for all He is worth, making a greater revelation of Him the primary goal of the Sunday sermon experience.

Such an outlook eventually produces spiritual hypochondriacs. Christians demand a regimen of churchly remedies to make life more bearable —

guaranteeing the enhancement of personal relationships, the development of human potential, or the healing of the “inner child”. These believers settle for spiritual sedatives that never can ignite a pursuit of Christ for who He is, what’s on His heart, and where He is headed.

Others term this trend the “*privatization*” of the gospel. The Good News has been reshaped to emphasize answers for *personal* hopes about success in marriage and family life, or satisfying emotional longings, or advancing career ambitions. Another insight from Charles Colson:

The Gospel has been transformed into a commodity, with the local church acting as the retail outlet, while members are seen as customers. Naïvely perhaps, we’ve marketed a “smorgasbord Christianity” that encourages us to pick and choose according to personal needs and tastes!

I have no intention of throwing stones here. Certainly none of this analysis is meant to single out clergy. I, too, have shortchanged the Gospel in my own ministry. Sometimes I, too, struggle with a loss of passion by entertaining meager messages about my Monarch.

As horrifying as the following questions may sound we need to ponder: Is the message spread by the evangelical church actually arousing *inordinate affections* in our hearers? Does it cause people to treasure the blessings of the Christian enterprise more than they treasure Christ *as the Prize*? Do we encourage people to want the *things* of Christ more than they want Christ *Himself*? Do we foster a vision among our people that makes the Lord Jesus a *means* to self-determined ends rather than the *End* for which we exist?

And when we invite people to Christ, do we inadvertently imply that they need only come to Him as far as *they* feel the need to come? In other words (and I shudder even to think it might be so!), do our offers of God’s grace unwittingly encourage others to *exploit* Christ for their own agendas? To attempt to *manipulate* Him to enhance their lives? To interpret Him essentially as someone at *their* disposal for their own benefit?

The answers can tell us a lot about the kind of gospel that occupies the hearts of many church members. Those answers can unmask a variety of “trite Christologies” that explain disconnections between claims about faith in Jesus and the depth (or lack thereof) of actual devotion to Him.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambitions when infinite Joy is offered us. We are far too easily pleased.

(C. S. LEWIS)

THINK WITH ME ...**What are some forms which “trite Christologies” take inside today’s Church?**

Sad to say, some church members appear to be more motivated to attend potluck suppers in Parish Hall than to prepare their souls for (or even to think about preparing for) the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19). How can that be?

How can it be that every week thousands of worshippers in Sunday services, convened to praise the Savior, find themselves embroiled in what observers call “worship wars”? We fuss so much over choosing correct choruses for our gatherings it’s hard to remain fascinated with the majesty of the Master we’ve come to adore. Some can become so passionate about styles or methods that they fail to get excited about the excellencies of the Son whose glories they celebrate. We’re intent on how the music meets our emotional needs; or how the rituals preserve our cherished traditions; or how our singing and prayers provide dynamic spiritual experiences. But, what kind of Savior have we proclaimed that allows such attitudes to arise among us in the first place?

When I encourage someone to “invite Jesus into your heart”, is it possible that in doing so I actually create a personal crisis of supremacy for her or him? What if a person unconsciously concludes from this phrase: “Jesus in my heart makes Him more readily available to me, as required to meet my needs, under my supervision so things don’t get out of hand”? No one would ever admit this out loud, of course. But for all practical purposes many have settled for a safer Savior, a manageable one, downgraded by theological formulas designed to make Him easier to cope with. Basically we have rendered Him *auxiliary* to our Christian experience. (The Bible might choose to call this *idolatry*!)

We have *trifled* with the Son of God! For all practical purposes our self-serving messages about Him have *domesticated* Him in our own eyes. We have *marginalized* Him among His own people. We have *sanitized* the Son of God! We’ve settled for sleepy, sentimental, scaled-down versions of the One who reigns supreme. We seldom see Him as Lord over creation, over history, over the Church and over all the ages to come. Seldom do our hearts and minds get intrigued with *Him* above everything else.

May Heaven forgive us! Trite Christologies haunt the evangelical movement. We’re plagued with a whole spectrum of self-serving messages that

gut the greatness of our hope in God while putting out the fire of our passion for Jesus. To name just a few, we've redefined the Lord Jesus Christ as:

- Our "*handyman*" — seen as a source of "quick fixes", to deal with our adversities by providing instant solutions on command.
- Our "*interior decorator*" — contracted to embellish and enhance everything we do in the arena of churchly activities, giving it that "extra something" that always makes our efforts feel so special.
- Our "*EMT*" (emergency medical technician) — poised on standby, ready to be brought in at those points where we have finally exhausted our own ingenuity and resources, especially in our determination to do something important for God.
- Our "*personal trainer*" — kept on retainer, the way we depend on our favorite golf coach, to provide practical pointers from time to time so we can play the game of life a little more successfully.
- Our "*pharmacist*" — dispensing liberating self-discoveries, or putting healing balm on hurting hearts, or prescribing salves for the suffering that life throws at us.

This is just a starter list. I'm sure you could come up with a number of other metaphors. But there's one more I'd like to suggest. It's the one I've observed most often in my years of travel in Christian circles — the one developed in chapter 1:

- Our "*mascot*"
This may be the most descriptive (and most disturbing) of all the self-serving visions of our Lord. We welcome Him among us to cheer us on, to inspire our efforts, to give us confidence about the outcome of the contest. But in the end the "game" is really about us, not about Him. We call the plays, organize the team, execute the strategies, pile up the points and achieve the wins. Most of the time Jesus is relegated to the sidelines as our figurehead — the "name" by which we take the field, the definition of all we aspire to, the one we call on when we get behind. Our cheers may be for Him, but our victories are for us. Rarely does it cross our minds that the *supremacy* of Christ means that He *is* the game in the final analysis. He coaches the players, calls the strategies, quarterbacks the plays, achieves the touchdowns, wins the game, and gets the "write up" next day. The

team has no existence and no reason to exist apart from Him. From Him, through Him, for Him, under Him, in Him and to Him are all things. And every fan in the stadium must bow at His feet before they dare to cheer in His name.

Each of these trite Christologies holds an element of truth, to be sure. Of course, Jesus is available for emergencies. Of course, He can transform everything we do for the Father into something beautiful. Of course, He trains, and cures, and inspires. Yet each of these taken alone betrays the scope of the hope God gives us in Christ's glorious greatness. How can heartfelt passion be ignited by trite Christologies like these? In fact, if this is all that He is — handyman, pharmacist, mascot — where's there any *need* for heartfelt passion to start with?

Clearly none of these “lesser lords” can ever begin to express the wonder of our original definition of Christ's supremacy (see chapter 1). None of them by themselves could ever begin to encourage an enthusiasm for Him that matches *Heaven's* celebration of ...

Who He is as the Son of God

(the summation of hope — the focus of His supremacy).

Where He leads in the Purposes of God

(the consummation of hope — the fulfillment of His supremacy).

How He imparts the Resources of God

(the approximation of hope — the fullness of His supremacy).

What He receives from the People of God

(the consuming passion of hope — the fervency of His supremacy).

May I be personal with you for a moment? For all practical purposes, what would the visible intensity of *your* passion as a disciple tell others about the “Christology” that empowers in your daily walk with the Son?

THINK WITH ME ...

What is the greatest tragedy shortsighted messages create?

Above every other concern this chapter has addressed regarding self-serving, shortsighted messages of Christ, surely the most grievous is this: *The Cross itself gets trivialized by every one of them.* Every superficial Christology distorts the testimony of Calvary. Our witness to each other about the wounds of Jesus ends up being weakened and wounded itself, rendered ineffective.

This same danger hounded 1st century Christians, too. That's why Paul composed such a dramatic close to his epistle to the Galatians. He knew they were susceptible to the seduction of shrunken gospels. So he wrote "God forbid that I should boast [a form of passion] except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ [the focus of passion], by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world [both displays of Christ's supremacy, keeping our passion alive]" (Gal. 6). No apologies here. These words exude confidence — not in a physical cross but in the One who hung there. The greatest power and most profound wisdom God would ever share — the fullest revelation of the magnitude of the Son's majesty — was manifested in the "powerlessness" and "simplicity" of Jesus as He died for all (1 Cor. 1 and 2).

So we, too, must return to the message of the Cross — to the passion of the Christ — if we're ever to restore *our* passion for Him and reaffirm our hope in Him for ALL that He is. Describing one form of his own zeal for his Lord, Paul exclaimed: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2). For him the Cross was inseparable from heart-and-soul *fergency* for Christ's supremacy!

THINK WITH ME ...

How did Jesus confront "trite Christologies" in His own ministry?

Our triflings with Jesus are not that much different from what we read in John 6. The crowd's goal, you'll recall, was to make Him their king. At first glance His supremacy seemed to have captured their hearts. But in point of fact they were simply clamoring for another round of miracle bread to satisfy their pressing lack of lunch. Jesus would have no part of the sham coronation. He rebuked them for ignoring the heavenly feast He had come to spread before them. His intended focus for them was not on His miracles but on *Himself*.

So, He presented them with an alternative — the opportunity to enter into a thoroughly exclusive, all-consuming relationship with Him as Lord. He described it in graphic terms using the

QUOTABLE QUOTE

In the midst of all gatherings of Thy people may there be the downfall of holy fire. May the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted in the midst of His church. Bring many to His feet, we pray. Work, Lord, work mightily! Thy church cries to Thee. Oh, leave us not! Lord Jesus, in Thee all fullness dwells. Thou dost fill heaven. Thou wilt surely fill all things. Fill us, oh! fill us today with all the fullness of God, and make Thy people joyful and strong and heavenly!

(CHARLES SPURGEON)

metaphor of *cannibalism*! He invited them to ingest His redeeming work by faith. (Now that represents passion!) The result, He promised, would be a totally resurrected life for any who engaged Him wholeheartedly and settle for nothing less.

To His sorrow, as John 6 records, most of Jesus' disciples walked away. It seems the parameters He set on passion were too comprehensive and demanding. Yet, paradoxically, they were also too narrow, too limiting, too exclusive. Fortunately, a remaining few concluded: "Where else can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!" In that hour their prior choice to wrap up their identity and destiny in Him was re-affirmed. Having already experienced firsthand eternal hope defined by His very presence, all but Judas determined Jesus would remain the love of their lives forever.

As the New Testament record testifies, their dedication to His exaltation stood the test of time. All the disciples labored tirelessly for the Kingdom out of devotion to their Lord until their earthy ministries ended, for many in martyrdom.

When Our Losses Become God's Gains

(Isaiah 54:1-8)

Hope and passion go together. Loss of hope in the Church normally results in loss of passion. Both shortfalls are usually the bitter fruit of a much greater deficiency: the crisis of supremacy. But this need not be the end of our story. God's Kingdom abounds with fresh opportunities.

Crisis and opportunity — quite a combination. The mix can be explosive when we belong to Jesus! No crisis of supremacy should ever be seen as irreversible. Proper repentance over trite Christologies holds the promise of *re-converting* us back to Christ for all that He is; *recommitting* us to His unrivaled dominion in our lives; *re-engaging* us with Him in the light of His incomparable glory and unshakeable purposes; *replacing* self-serving messages about Him with a hope set on "things above, where Christ sits at God's right hand" — in order to walk once again in the triumphs of His grace.

THINK WITH ME ...**Why might Chinese and Hebrew words for “crisis” encourage us?**

The Chinese word for crisis combines two characters: One for “danger” and the other for “opportunity”. Mandarin speakers correctly conclude that a crisis not only alerts us to imminent danger but also opens us to previously unexploited opportunities. The same is true for the crisis of supremacy with its attendant loss of hope and passion. Left unchecked the crisis is spiritually threatening. But it can also become God’s tool to help us write a dynamic new chapter in the history of the Christian movement. It can become His prod. It can incite in us far deeper explorations of the King’s heart, far richer experiences of the King’s dominion.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for crisis carries much the same idea as the Chinese characters. The term literally means a “birthing stool”. It refers to a piece of furniture upon which a Jewish woman would position herself in Old Testament times to aid in delivery of her baby. To be sure, the stool was a place of pain and trauma. A woman in labor might feel as if she were being swallowed up in the contractions. But at the end travail gave way to the marvelous moment of motherhood. Agony turned to fulfillment. At the foot of the stool emerged a new life, a new beginning. In the same way a spiritual crisis can actually “midwife” a whole new set of blessings as our desperation pushes us back into the arms of the Son of God.

Speaking for myself, I know it’s time for *me* to face straight-on any remaining crises of supremacy in my own life. Each one establishes a unique opportunity to say once again:

I affirm:

In light of all Christ is, there is far *more* of Him to know than I’ve yet discovered.

Therefore, I must be passionate to know Him much more than I am. And I must draw near to Him with far more hope in Him than ever before.

I also affirm:

There is much *more* God longs for the Church to discover about His Son.

I must, therefore, proclaim Him to Christians more fully than I ever have. Considering the full extent of hope believers share in Christ’s supremacy, I must never fear praying for or proclaiming His glory too much.

Do these affirmations reflect desires of your heart, too? If so, I invite you to come with me into **Volume III: A Campaign of Hope**. It is the best next step we can take together. Let me show you why.

THINK WITH ME ...

Are you willing to join me in a Campaign of Hope?

Even as I write, zeal for our Triumphant Lord is being stirred afresh in thousands of Christian young people around the world who are affirming their willingness to follow Christ at any cost. They share a common conviction: “God is preparing to give our generation a mighty revelation of the glory of His Son for the sake of the nations, and we want to be part of it!”

Theirs is a Campaign of Hope. They are inviting others to join them. Over the past two decades I’ve walked among movements of young people worldwide who care deeply about Christ and His global cause, such as: Youth with a Mission, Operation Mobilization, Marches for Jesus, Mission Korea, Europe Hope, Teen Mania, Acquire The Fire, Caleb Project, The Call, Campus Renewal, Sold Out, along with the tried-and-true works of Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

One such movement actually incorporated itself recently with the word “*Passion*”! Then teams of students were sent to university campuses across America to raise up communities of worshippers-doubling-as-evangelists. Sponsoring annual national gatherings, they recruited thousands to commit to 24 hours of fasting and prayer while camping out in open farm fields. The events, called “One Day”, were designed to return young people to schools and churches with one resolve: To glorify Christ and help fulfill His purposes for earth’s unreached peoples.

The common thread that runs through all of these examples? Passion for Christ and His Kingdom. His youthful followers are inflamed by hope in His supremacy. But this is a movement open to young and old alike. Campaigns of similar design (even if the particulars are quite different) must become a lifestyle for all of us who want to confront and cure the crisis of supremacy inside the Church. **Volume Three** explores many practical strategies for getting a Campaign of Hope off the ground where you live.

First, we tackle the priority question: “What must such a campaign proclaim?” (This is answered in *chapter 9*.) The right message at the right moment has the power to restore vision and re-ignite passion toward Christ, unleashing a Christ-awakening in one life or in one church. Proclaiming

among *Christians* a fuller vision of Jesus and His reign not only recaptures hearts for Him but ultimately empowers many to proclaim the same message among the nations. We're on our way to seize new ground for His mission among the lost.

Then *chapters 10-12* unpack three major applications of that message to be used wherever it is proclaimed to God's people. Each fills in the "job description" for those whom God uses to help the Church recover the *hope* in Jesus we are meant to have. I call them Messengers of *Hope*, Prisoners of *Hope* and Vanguards of *Hope*.

Ponder the egg! In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis, speaking of Christian conversion, warned that eggs (believers) must either "hatch or go bad". The chick can't stay inside the shell indefinitely and expect to thrive. In the same way, unless Campaigns of Hope begin to unfold inside many of our churches, a whole lot of "chicks" may never break free of their "shells". They may never discover the richness of following Jesus without limits.

"Hatch or go bad." Isn't it time for a host of heralds to invade the "chicken coop" and set some captives free?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

What is at stake in pastoral admonition and in preaching is not merely the Church's progress in sanctification but its perseverance in final salvation. There is no standing still in the Christian life. Either we are advancing toward salvation, or we are drifting away to destruction. Drifting is mortal danger (Heb. 2:1). If we do not point our people to the inexhaustible riches of Christ so as to stir them up to go forward into more of God, then we encourage drifting downstream where they will make shipwreck of their faith. (1 Tim. 1:19)

(DR. JOHN PIPER)

Before exploring the campaign, however, experience a "pause that refreshes". Set aside the next five minutes for *Interlude II: A Prayer over the Crisis of Supremacy*. Use it to confess the crux of our crisis to the Father. Recite it to declare your desire for deeper devotion to the Son. Let it be your cry to the Spirit to restore the hope all of us so desperately need.

Try reading it aloud. Make it your own. See if it does not touch what really matters to you at this moment. See if it does not express to God a little of what you are feeling right now.

INTERLUDE II

A Prayer Over the Crisis

*(To be read responsively where possible, using alternate
dark and light print)*

We press into Your heart this day, glorious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We celebrate all that Your precious Son is — who He is to us, and for us, over us, and within us, through us, and before us, and upon us.

Before all Heaven we proclaim:

- **Christ is supreme!** — He is sovereign, superior, sufficient and totally satisfying!
- **Christ is our hope!** — He is the summation of all Your promises, the source of all Your riches, more and more and more, for now and forever!

- **Christ is our glory!** — He is Alpha & Omega, the consummation of all Your purposes, for all creation, for all peoples, for all the Ages to come! In Him our life is hidden with You, until the hour He returns in the final triumphs of grace and truth.
- **Christ is among us!** — He is accessible to us now, in all of His riches. He stands with us now, willing, able and ready to act for us, in us, and through us to magnify ALL that He is, before us and before all nations!

[*SELAH: Pause for silent reflection*]

Therefore, we REPENT — individually and on behalf of all your people:

- **We repent ... for how we have *diminished* your Son,** regarding Him more as our mascot than our Monarch.
- **We repent ... for how we have *manipulated* your Son,** coming to Him to use Him, as far as we think we need Him — that far and no more.
- **We repent ... for how we have *hoarded* your Son,** seeking His blessings for ourselves, with little thought about bringing those blessings to others. **We've assumed that He was there only for us.** We've acted as if He was not Lord of neighbors and nations.
- **We repent ... for how we have *resisted* your Son,** withholding our affections from Him because we were afraid of what it would cost us to draw near to Him — and thus we denied His lordship over all.
- **WE repent ... for how we've *replaced* your Son...with creeds, and programs, and organizations, and causes performed in His name — but without the consuming passion He deserves as the Center and Circumference of everything for us and all peoples everywhere.**

[*SELAH: Pause for silent reflection*]

Confront our crisis of supremacy. **O Lamb of God.** *Cast out* our crisis of supremacy. **O Lamb of God.** *Cure* our crisis of supremacy. **O Lamb of God.**

Forgive us! **Cleans us!** Purify us! **Resurrect us!** Re-convert us!
Restore us! Refill us! **Re-commission us!** By your blood. By Your
 mercy. O Lamb of God. **O Lamb of God.**

We are *ready* — **ready!** ... to revolutionize mind and action with new hope
 in the promises of your Word ... **ready!** ... to embrace the full extent of
 Christ's glorious reign for us and all peoples ... **ready!** ... to walk with Him
 in passionate obedience ... **ready!** ... to be wrapped up in Him and His
 global cause ... **ready!...** for this...**and nothing less!**

Together in hope, with brokenness mixed with great joy — **O God of our
 salvation, we cry out for all to hear:** “*Lord Jesus, Come and
 conquer us! Lord Jesus, Come and conquer us! Lord Jesus, Come
 and conquer us!*”

[*SELAH: Pause for silent reflection*]

Holy Father, in this decisive moment, by Your Spirit, we adore Your Son
 using the words of Saint Augustine:

**“Redeemer of the ends of the earth:
 You called, You cried, You shattered our deafness.
 You sparkled, You burned, You drove away our blindness.
 You shed your fragrance, and we drew in our breath.
 Therefore, from now on, we will pant for YOU alone.”**

To that end, Father, awaken us — **awaken us to see ALL that the Lord
 Jesus Christ is:** to see who He is as the Son of God ... **to see where He
 is leading in the Purposes of God** ... to see how He imparts the
 Resources of God ... **and to see what He must receive from the
 People of God.** Quicken us to pursue Your magnificent promises which
 are wonderfully defined by His supremacy! **Help us recover ALL the
 hope we are meant to have in our Sovereign Savior.** Do this for the
 revelation of Your glory in Him, throughout this nation — **and among all
 the nations** — beginning in this hour and in this place. **Hallelujah!**
AMEN! Amen! **It shall be done!** It *shall* be done.

