

The Passion of God

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and holy desire in responding to the passion of God and cooperating with the Holy Ghost in the conflict of redemption.

Scripture: Isaiah 42:14, Isaiah 64:1

Topics: "God's Passion", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

A.B. Simpson passionately explores the 'Passion of God,' emphasizing God's longing to reveal His glory and power amidst a spiritually indifferent world. He draws parallels between the cries of the prophets and the heart of God, illustrating how divine passion is mirrored in the struggles of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Simpson urges believers to awaken from complacency and engage in fervent prayer, highlighting the necessity of cooperation with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's redemptive work. He emphasizes that the church must respond to God's call, allowing the Holy Spirit to work through them to bring about transformation and revival. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, passionate desire for God's presence and action in the world.

Transcript

I have long time held my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once (margin: I will gasp and pant together. R.V.). (Is. 42: 14.)

This impassioned text has been appropriately and not irreverently described as the passion of God. But it is not the only passage in this intense prophetic volume which expresses the majestic appearing of Jehovah as He arises for the vindication of His glory and the deliverance of His people. Again and again we find the prophet's soul enkindled to the most sublime enthusiasm as he describes the march of God's glorious purpose towards its end. The picture becomes a sort of heavenly drama in which the heart of God upon the throne and the Holy Spirit in the church below move in sympathy in the mighty conflict.

Our text is really associated with a number of similar texts which together afford a striking picture of the intense conflict in the heavenly places which is ever going forward with intenser force as the crisis of the age draws nigh.

I. The cry.

The first passage in this sublime drama is Isaiah 64: 1-4, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might flow down at Your presence, as when the melting fire burns, the fire causes the waters to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence. When You did terrible things which we looked not for, You came down, the mountains flowed down at Your presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, beside You, what He has prepared for him that wait for Him."

This is the cry of the waiting soul for God to reveal Himself in the majesty of His glory and His power. There are times when the hearts of men seem to have become so stupidly indifferent, when the church herself is so fast asleep, and when even earnest hearts seem to have settled down to such a dead level of self-content, that the praying souls who look out upon the religious conditions of our time are compelled to send up this passionate cry as they feel that nothing less than the very dynamite of God can clear the air and wake the dead.

It is like one of those days which sometimes come in summer when the atmosphere is so sultry and the air so dead that we breathe by gasps, and after a while we instinctively look out upon the horizon and long for the electric storm, the cleaving lightning and the crashing thunder to break the awful spell, to clear the air and restore our vital breath.

Such a condition is upon us today in the religious history of our time. The public conscience is so corrupted that vice has ceased to stir us. The horrors of war grow insipid through the hardening influence of habit. The moral and social standards of mankind and the tone of public opinion grow looser and lower. The chief interest of the study even of God's Holy Word is centered upon the excitement of higher criticism. Intellectual doubt has pushed aside the simple faith of other days. The world has swept away the barriers of separation and the church is sleeping on the enchanted ground of self-complacency. Even those who know and love the Master best feel paralyzed by the presence of depressing conditions in the air, and Zion's watchmen are crying out in desperate earnestness, "Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down." (Is. 64: 1.)

This is not a figure of speech referring to God's historical manifestation at Mt. Sinai and in the wilderness or as He came in Isaiah's time to destroy the armies of Sennacherib and deliver Jerusalem, for as we read the passage through we find that verse four forms part of one of the most important quotations in one of Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 2: 9, 10.) There he applies all this directly to the Holy Spirit, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

This mighty revelation of God for which the prophet cries is not a mere miraculous display of His glory and His power before the nations, but a spiritual coming of the Holy Ghost to the hearts of His people as they seek Him in earnestness and faith, for he adds (Is. 64: 5), "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness." God is waiting therefore to reveal to earnest souls the glory of His grace and power in a measure such as "eye has not seen nor ear heard," nor our highest spiritual conceptions have ever dreamed. Shall we meet His challenge? Shall we send up the cry until the heavens open and God comes down in the revelation of His presence and His power, and the mountains of opposition and iniquity melt away at His presence, and the melting fire of apostolic love kindles the heart of the church of God, and the waters boil in the engines of our spiritual machinery, and the power of God goes forth into every agency of Christian work and world-wide evangelization?

That is what the prayer may mean according as our faith will dare to claim it. God give us the prayer and the answer until the church of God shall wake from her debasing slumber and once more stand forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners."

II. The answer.

Our text proper is the answer to this cry. "I have long time held My peace; I have been still and refrained myself : now will I cry like a travailing woman. (Is. 42: 14.) The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: He shall cry, yes, roar; He shall prevail against His enemies." (Is. 42: 13).

Yes, God waits and suffers long. The cry of the needy seems unheeded, the triumph of the proud appears unchallenged, the prayer of the saint finds no answer, but God is not asleep or dead. Prayer is accumulating before the throne. God is waiting until the cup of sin is full and the moment strikes when all the forces of His omnipotence are let loose in a cyclone of glorious power and victorious majesty.

What a blending of splendid figures we have here! There is the shout of the warrior. There is the cry of the travailing woman. There is the convulsion of a great cyclone. There is the gasp and the panting of a mighty wrestle, and there is the final overthrow of every obstacle and opposition. What does all this mean?

1. It is a picture of the heart of God. Our heavenly Father is not a selfish embodiment of isolation and power like the Buddhist's dream of Nirvana, but a great, loving, living heart in constant touch with the needs of His people and the conditions of the world over which He reigns. He that made the heart of the soldier has in Him all the heroic qualities which have illuminated the battlefields of earth. He who made the tempest and the lightning has in Him all the force of which they are but heart throbs. He who gave the mother her passionate love has in Him all the depths of maternal tenderness for His suffering children. He who created the father's heart is the great Father Himself. Look at Him as He seeks for His lost Adam amid the shades of Eden crying, "Adam, where are you?" Listen to Him as He cries out over a sin-cursed world, "It repents Me that I have made man and I will destroy him from the face of the earth." (Gen. 6: 6, 7.) Listen again as He cries over the sufferings of Israel in the brick-fields of Egypt, "I have seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows." (Ex. 3: 7.) Hear Him as He wails over Ephraim, His prodigal child, "How shall I give you up, Ephraim; how shall I deliver you, Israel? My heart is turned within Me; My repentings are kindled together." (Hosea 11: 8.) Listen as He pleads through Jeremiah with His wandering bride, Israel. "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals." (Jer. 2: 2.) Listen again as there falls from heaven the sweet cadence of His love. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him, for He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust." (Ps. 103: 13, 14.) And yet once more a softer cadence falls and the words breathe out the tenderest depths of maternal love. "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." (Is. 66: 13.)

Yes, that is the great Heart whose pulse beats move the mighty universe and throb responsive to His children's need and His people's cry. He will not always be silent. He will respond.

"Oh, watchers on the mountain height,

Stand firm and steadfast there;

Oh, wrestlers in the vale beneath,

Cease not your sevenfold prayer;

God will not always wait; He will

Accept your sacrifice;

Oh, loving hearts and praying hands,

God will in love arise."

2. It means not only the heart of God, but the passion of Christ, His beloved Son. Isaiah has given us a picture of this passion. (Is. 58: 1-5). He beholds a mighty Conqueror marching from Edom, glorious in His apparel and yet with garments stained with blood; and as he listens the Conqueror proclaims His mighty name, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." But the prophet asks, "Why are You red in Your apparel, and Your garments like him that treads in the wine vat?" Once more comes the answer, "I have trodden the winepress alone. I looked and there was none to help; I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore My own arm brought salvation unto Me, and My fury, it upheld Me."

This is a picture of the Son of God in the mighty conflict of redemption. The passion of His Father's heart was passed on to Him, and with obedience and willing love He has hastened down to meet the awful emergency and lead the mightiest battle of the ages. The hate of Satan, the opposition of men, the power of earth and hell were all arrayed against Him and as He pressed through to the cross, He cried in the intensity of His agony, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." (Luke 12: 50.) The curtain rises for a moment on that agony in Gethsemane and His sweat is as great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Once more He seems to sink in dying anguish on the cross, but again we hear the shout of victory, "It is finished," and we see the rending gates of death as He comes forth a conqueror in His resurrection. He passes through the heavenly gates in His ascension glory, but even there the conflict does not end. Still He is regarded as the great High Priest and mediatorial King. Still He is leading the hosts of God as the Captain of our salvation, and still we hear the shout of the Conqueror, and we feel the falling tear of the Sufferer as "He is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Bending from the throne, He whispers to persecuting Saul, "Why do you persecute Me?" Pleading at the closed heart of the sinner, He cries, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." (Rev. 3: 20.)

Yes, it is the passion of God still in the heart of Jesus, and the conflict must still go on until the last enemy is subdued and the last saint is gathered home.

3. The passion of the Holy Ghost. The Father passes on the burden to His beloved Son, and the Son in turn has transferred it to the Holy Ghost. It is His high vocation to finish the work which Jesus began upon earth. Unlike the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost has no body of His own, and therefore His conflict is carried on in the body of Christ, which is the church. It is our hearts that must feel His agony. It is our lips that must breathe His prayer. It is our hands that must be responsive to His touch. And in all this we are but representing our Living Head, the Lord Jesus in heaven as well as our Living Heart, the Holy Ghost on earth.

Now, the Spirit is constantly represented in the New Testament as a suffering, sympathizing Being. We can "grieve" Him, thus implying that His heart is sensitive to slight and to sorrow. The Apostle James tells us that "The Holy Spirit that dwells in us loves us to jealousy." Therefore we can wound His jealous love by failing to meet His expectations and give to God our whole devotion. In a very remarkable passage in the

eighth chapter of Romans, He is said to make "intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." These groanings represent the agony of prayer by which He works out in the hearts of His people the victories of grace.

In yet another passage (Eph. 6: 10-18) we find Him leading the great conflict in the heavenly places where the weapon is "the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God," and the agency of victory is "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." So we find the Holy Ghost sharing the passion of God and all through the Christian age representing the suffering of heaven in the long agony of the redemption's conflict.

4. The cooperation of the people of God. But it is through the hearts of His people that the Holy Ghost must work, and if we are not responsive to His touch, how can He work? If you had a paralyzed tongue and arms and limbs enfeebled by disease, your brain might think never so wisely, your will might purpose never so forcibly, but all would be futile if your tongue refused to speak a word, your feet to move to the message and your hands to fulfil the plan.

So the Holy Ghost is hindered by the unresponsiveness of His people and the agony is often caused chiefly by His struggle to awaken our slumbering souls to understand His thought and to enter into His prayer. As we look back through the history of earnest lives, we find that the servants of God were sufferers. Jeremiah was like a sensitive harp echoing every sorrow of his suffering people. "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears," was his cry, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Again he cries, "I said, I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name; but His Word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay."

We find the great Isaiah crying out as he watches the burden of Dumah, "My loins are filled with pain; pains have taken hold of me as the pains of a woman that travails; my heart panted; fearfulness frightened me. Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes and also the night."

Habakkuk, the poet prophet, pleaded with God, "Oh Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in wrath remember mercy," and God answers his prayer by a hurricane of power. "His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of His praise; the mountains saw You and they trembled, the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high; You went forth for the salvation of Your people."

We find Deborah raised up in Israel as the counselor of Barak; and while he leads the battle in the front, she waits in her tent in a greater conflict of prayer. As she prays, the whole panorama passes before her until the enemy is scattered and the shout of triumph rises over the land and Deborah is in it all, and as the cyclone in her soul subsides in peace, she breathes out her glad relief in the cry, "O my soul, you have trodden down strength."

It was thus that Elijah prayed on Carmel when his body was bowed together in soul travail until an answer came.

It was thus that Paul described his spiritual sufferings for his flock. "I want you to know what great conflict I have for you," and then he explains it all in that profound passage (Col. 1: 24), "I rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, the church." And a little later (Col. 1: 29), "I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me

mightily."

Writing to the Galatians he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you," and to the Philippians he says, "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ," and it is with reference to them he writes, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me."

This is the very mystery of fellowship with Jesus. This is the deepest secret of power. This is the highest service that we can render to Christ and His church. Sometimes the prayer becomes a groan until we think our prayer is lost, but that is the very moment when it has overcome.

Sometimes God lays upon a praying one the burden of a worker, and while the one is active, the other is silent, and yet the silent force is the real power. Anna Shipton tells of having had upon her heart for some weeks a minister of Christ in a ceaseless agony of prayer. During that time, ignorant altogether of her prayer for him, he was led into the fulness of Christ and became the instrument in the salvation of scores of souls, and never knew until afterwards that the secret of it all was a silent, suffering life which was not even in outward contact with him.

This was the secret of that wonderful revival that has lately swept through the valleys of Wales. This was the secret of the power of David Brainard, Jonathan Edwards and William Burns. It is this that is to set the church on fire with consecration and holiness. It is this that is to awaken a zeal which will give to her languid work something of the energy of the great enterprise of modern commerce. It is this that is to bring the great evangelistic and missionary campaign which will give the gospel as a witness to the world and prepare the way of our coming Lord. And it is this which is to set in motion the mighty forces of providence among the nations which will "overturn and overturn and overturn until He shall come whose right it is."

There was a man in ancient Babylon to whom God gave the name, "Oh, man of desires." The secret of Daniel's character was a great capacity for holy desire. He had insatiable longings for the kingdom of God, and he prayed them out for weeks together in an agony of love. What followed?

The mightiest conqueror on earth was sitting upon the throne of the empire. Cyrus, sated with conquests, had nothing more to ask of earthly success. Suddenly there came to him a strange purpose and he issued a decree telling the world that the Lord God of heaven had commanded him to build Him a house in Jerusalem and to send back the captive Jews. But behind that decree and that band of returning captives and that restored city and temple, see that "man of desires" silently praying in Babylon.

Or shall we look at a still grander vision? There is silence in heaven. The voice of God has hushed every angelic song, for the prayers of the saints are being brought in. They have been long accumulating, they have been treasured up in golden vials. God sends for them to be presented at His throne, and as He breathes in their sweetness, mingled with the incense of the great High Priest Himself, no sound is permitted to disturb the sacred hour. But this is not all. The command is next given to take these prayers and pour them out upon the earth again, and as they are emptied back upon the world from which they came, lo, there are voices and thunderings and a great earthquake, and the mighty angels of the coming advent begin to sound the trumpets that proclaim that the consummation of the age has come.

And come through prayer; come through the passion of holy desire in loving, longing Christian hearts. Oh, that we might understand our high calling! Oh, that we might enter into the Holiest by His precious blood!

Oh, that we might know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings! Oh, that we might be saved from the curse of lukewarmness and "enkindled with the passion fire of love divine"!

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