M.I. RELIGIOUS PASSION MAKES US PROUD AND ALIENATES US FROM GOD. FAITHFUL LOVE HUMBLES US AND MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD.

I. WON’T WIN WITH RELIGION (Vs. 9:30-33)

BEING RELIGIOUS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MAKING US RIGHT WITH GOD.

A. THE NON RELIGIOUS (V. 30)

B. THE VERY RELIGIOUS (V. 31)

C. THE WEAKNESS OF RELIGION (Vs. 32-33)

II. WON’T WIN WITH PASSION (Vs. 10:1-4)

PASSION IS NOT USEFUL UNLESS IT IS HUMBLY SUBORDINATED TO THE WORD AND WILL OF GOD.

A. RIGHTLY DIRECTED PASSION (V. 1)

B. WRONGLY DIRECTED PASSION (Vs. 2-3)

C. THE WEAKNESS OF PASSION (V. 4)

III. FAITH WINS EVERY TIME (Vs. 5-13)

IT IS ONLY BY PLACING OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THAT CAN PUT US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

A. DON’T SAY … (Vs. 5-7)

B. DO SAY … (Vs. 8-10)

C. THE POWER OF FAITH (Vs. 11-13)
Do you ever look around the world, scratch you head, and wonder what life’s all about? I look at the world and almost always come away confused. We see heroic and generous acts of kindness like a man giving one of his kidneys so a little girl can live. We see young men and women in our armed forces going to war to protect our country and our way of life.

We also see incredibly horrific and senseless acts of violence like the Washington DC snipers who killed people at random. We see street gang violence taking young people’s lives every day.

Even if we were to examine our own personal situations, we would be able to see how we have been on the receiving end of someone’s generous and loving behavior towards us. But which one of us hasn’t experienced being hurt by others’ selfishness and insensitive words and actions?

Making it even more confusing, if we were to examine our own lives, we would find both acts of love and acts of hurt that we have directed towards others. In the world, in others, and even in our own souls, we find both noble, selfless acts of goodness and selfish, self-centered, evil thoughts and behaviors. That’s what confuses us.

Here’s what I want us to think about this morning: We are confused and often frightened by this conflict between good and evil that rages on inside of each one of us. The core root of the conflict is that since we are all created in the image of God, we have this desire to do and be good, but because we are all selfish and self-centered, we have a natural attraction to evil.
The Bible says that since we have all done harmful things, and given in to the dark side of our beings, we find ourselves as enemies of God. That is where fear and anxiety that we just can’t name comes from. We often find ourselves fearful, anxious, empty … over nothing in particular. That feeling comes from being in a wrong relationship with God. This morning, I want to be as clear as I can how it is that we get to be in a right relationship with God. When we are in a right relationship with God, the fear, confusion, and emptiness tend to go away; all of a sudden we find joy, peace, and contentment in life.

But in order to find this, and I hope you will give me your undivided attention; let me tell you about a time honored tradition that takes place in church every Sunday, not particularly in this church, but certainly in that church that I used to pastor. You know that church that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that one Sunday, I was explaining this time honored church tradition. In the Old Testament Bible times, kings and prophets believed that God gave them direction in dreams. If they wanted to know what to do for the people, they would try to receive a direct word from God in their dreams. If they weren’t getting any messages in their dreams while lying in their own beds, they would go to sleep in the temple, where they believed it would work much better. This is the origin of the time-honored tradition of sleeping in church. I wanted to point that out even though the church leaders, who would have appreciated it most, didn’t hear grasp this message.

We all need to hear today’s message since it is one of the clearest descriptions of how we get right with God.
In John White’s 1971 book *The Devil*, he described the situation we all find ourselves in. When I heard about this painting, I tracked it down and made sure I saw it when it came to the Chicago Art Museum. The title of the painting is, “Checkmate.” It shows a picture of a chessboard with the devil sitting on one side, and across from him is a frightened young man. The Devil has a proud, arrogant, triumphant look on his face. While the youth, has a forlorn, dejected, look of defeat on his. Here is the interesting part of the painting. The youth is focused on the board and the devil.

One day, the famous American chess champion of the world was touring the gallery and this painting caught his eye. He gazed at the painting in silent reflection for a long time. Then he excitedly exclaimed, “Bring me a chessboard; there’s one – only one, mind you – but there’s one move whereby I can save him.” Can you imagine the excitement? If only he could get the youth’s attention. “Look at me!” Murphy may have yelled out, “Take your eyes off the Devil and the board! … Look at me. I can save you!” But alas, it’s a painting and the youth is frozen there for all time, frightened, tormented, and checkmated by the Devil.

Aren’t we like that? People have hurt us. Our relationships are broken. We face sickness. Our loved ones have died or are dying. The world we live in is frightening, and we are uncertain about our futures. We find ourselves frozen like the youth in the painting. We just can’t seem to find the peace, the joy, and the contentment we so deeply desire.

Last week we talked about ways in which we try to find peace, joy, and contentment; we said that many people try to fill up the emptiness with religion. They
become religious, go to church, do all kinds of religious things, but in the end are still as 
lost and confused as when they started. And, to make things worse, religious people go 
around trying to make people think and act like they do. They become proud, stubborn 
and arrogant. They fool themselves into thinking they are better than others. Religious 
people are a lot like reformed smokers and thin people who used to be fat. They are 
judgmental and forget how tough life is. But the bible informed us last week that being 
religious has nothing to do with making us right with God.

Others try to fill the emptiness with passion and people chase after things for 
pleasure. Our society chases after money, power, prestige, entertainment, and sex. All 
these things do is cause us to treat people as objects. We come to love things and use 
people … instead of using things and loving people. I’m sure we all know what it feels 
like to be used by people and we know that we have used and manipulated others. The 
funny thing is once we get these things that we thought would make us happy, we find 
they just make us hungry for more. People with money want more money. People with 
power crave power. No longer does normal sex satisfy us, we become more and more 
perverted. Passion is not useful unless it is humbly subordinated to the word and will of 
God.

So we have seen in our search for the joy, peace, and contentment that bring 
meaning to life … being religious and being passionate will never win the day. In fact: 
**RELIGIOUS PASSION MAKES US PROUD AND ALIENATES US FROM GOD.**

**FAITHFUL LOVE HUMBLES US AND MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD.** Did 
you hear that? Humility … faithful … love … those are words that are not very popular
today. In fact they sound hokey and weak … yet the Bible tells us that is the only way we can get right with God.

You may be here this morning facing a situation in which you feel the Devil has checkmated you. He may be gloating and trash talking you. But Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. He is knocking and calling out. He is saying, “There is one more move! Open the door to your heart and let me in! I can save you! I can win this match for you! There is only one move … but it will save you!”

III. FAITH WINS EVERY TIME (Vs. 5-13)
IT IS ONLY BY PLACING OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THAT CAN PUT US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Here it is; faith wins every time. This winning faith is defined in verses 5-13 of chapter 10. Here is the move that will change our eternal destinies and our every day lives: IT IS ONLY BY PLACING OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THAT CAN PUT US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. I want to encourage each one of us here this morning to take our eyes off our situations, our enemies, and the Devil. Let’s place our eyes on Jesus. Let’s see what He has done for us, and hopefully those of us who have been saved will renew our commitment to that saving move we made. And, those who are not yet saved will this morning make that one saving move.

A. DON’T SAY … (Vs. 5-7)

Verses 5-7 tell us what we don’t need to say and certainly what we should not say. Don’t say Jesus is not for me. Don’t say that salvation is not for me. Don’t say my situation is beyond hope. Don’t say these good things can’t happen to me. Don’t say I’m not good enough, and above all, don’t say God is far away and doesn’t care.”
Most people confuse religion with Jesus. A lot of people tell me, “You know John, I’m not very religious,” to which I immediately respond, “Neither am I.” They say, “If I were to go into church, the ceiling would fall down,” to which I say, “I go there every day, and it hasn’t fallen down yet.” How many of you have seen the “Ten Commandments” on television? You know the story. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God sent 10 plagues to destroy the Egyptians, and the Israelites were set free. What the movie didn’t show was how the Israelites dealt with their newfound freedom. Every time they hit a rough spot on their journey towards the Promised Land, they complained, they criticized Moses and God, and continually wanted to go back and be slaves in Egypt. They tried to kill Moses, and others tried to take over the leadership. They were so rebellious that God kept them in the Wilderness for 40 years. Now these verses come from Moses’ speech to the Israelites right before they go in and conquer the Promised Land. Moses warns them to be people of faith; they should learn to trust and love God, care for and love one another, be fair and remain sexually pure.

All God wanted from them was that they place their faith in Him. The laws weren’t really difficult to keep and if the Hebrews loved God and one another, they would keep the law. Look at verses 6-7. Almost every time the Israelites faced difficult situations in their history, they would focus on the problem and forget about God. Look what the Apostle Paul tells us here; if you are facing some real trying situations in life and need Jesus, know that He is near. Nobody has to go up to heaven to find Jesus. Jesus loved us so much that He came down from heaven, took on human flesh to live for us and die for us.
You see, even though God is a loving God … He is also holy, just, and pure. If we were to take time and think about all the bad things we have done in our lives … we would immediately realize that we can’t go back and fix them. We deserve death for the damage we have done. But Jesus paid the price for us. Jesus said that He was God and that His death was for us.

But we don’t have to go down and bring Jesus up from the dead. He has risen from the dead and His resurrection from the dead proves that what He says is true.

In his farewell speech to the Israelites, Moses reminded them that they did not deserve God’s blessings. They were going to receive it simply because God loved them and chose them. All they had to do was humbly receive this gift.

I want to remind all of us, those of us who have never received Jesus, and those of us who are shutting Him out; Jesus is near. How near? Jesus stands at the door of our hearts. He is knocking and calling out. He wants to come in, save you, and journey with you, even through the most frightening and sorrowful seasons of life. I’m sure that if each of us took the time to listen, we would hear God calling out to us in love. So don’t say God is not close to me. Don’t say Jesus doesn’t love me. Don’t say good things can’t happen to me.”

B. DO SAY … (Vs. 8-10)

On the other hand, verses 8-10 tell us what to say. We should say, “Jesus is near, Jesus loves me, and Jesus died for me. Jesus wants to come into my life and save me.” I titled this two-part message, “Put your money where your mouth is.” This is what faith is all about; first, it is belief, and it is believing what God says in the Bible. God says that because of my selfishness, my bad thoughts, my bad words, and my bad behavior, I
deserve to be separated from Him and His love not only in this world, but for all eternity. Further, there is nothing I can do to clean myself off and make myself acceptable to him. It’s like when I was a kid, and my dad used to take me fishing, sometimes, my line would get tangled up. I would start to try and untangle it … but the more I fooled with it, the more of a mess I would make. Finally, I would have to give it to my father to fix. That’s the way it is with sin in our lives. We cannot fix it. The Bible goes on to say that Jesus came to fix the sin problem. Jesus came to untangle the mess we have made out of our lives. Jesus came to fill the emptiness and reconcile us with God. Further, the Bible says that we can receive these gifts, simply by receiving them in faith. These promises are guaranteed by the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead to prove that all He said about Himself was true. Believing all these promises are what the phrase, “Believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead,” means.

Which brings us to the; put your money where your mouth is part. Faith becomes the action that we take based on these beliefs. Do you believe Jesus loves you? Do you believe that He died for you? Do you believe Him when He says that salvation is free? Do you believe He is at the door of your heart, knocking and calling out to you?

If you do, then take the action called for and open the door to your heart. Ask Him to come in. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sin. Ask Him to take control of your life. That’s what it means to confess Jesus as Lord.

You don’t have to climb a mountain in Tibet to receive Jesus. You don’t have to wait until you get your life straightened out before you receive Jesus. Right here … right now is the time to get right with God.
So please, do say this morning, “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. My life is a mess. I have shut You out of my life and ignored You. Please forgive me of all of my sins. Come into my life and save my soul. You are my Savior. I want to live my life as You have designed it. You are my Lord. Amen.”

C. THE POWER OF FAITH (Vs. 11-13)

If that’s a prayer that you have prayed or want to pray, you will see the power of faith as described in verses 11-13. Will your situation improve? Probably not. Will your problems go away? Most definitely not. But a whole of other things will change. First, we will find ourselves in a right relationship with God. We will be at peace. As we trust in God, we know that we have a powerful ally who will never leave or forsake us. The Bible says that nothing in this life … not sickness, not poverty, not tragedy … nothing in this life, or the next will ever be able to separate us from God’s love. God becomes our Father. Look at verse 12. The world talks about diversity, but they can never pull off reconciliation between cultures and races. But in God’s family, you will have brothers and sisters from every race, culture, ethnic, and economic group. There are no distinctions between God’s children. It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white, yellow or red, rich or poor, male or female, educated or uneducated. In God’s family, we are all brothers and sisters. We are God’s children. That’s the only place where true reconciliation can take place. When we are reconciled with God, faith demands that we be reconciled with one another. Doesn’t your heart say yes to that? Isn’t that the type of family you desire to belong to?

Again, look at verse 13. How do we enter this relationship with God and with one another? “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved: IT IS ONLY BY
PLACING OUR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THAT CAN PUT US IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Are you tired of being anxious, afraid, or empty? Religion can’t help you, passion, pride, chasing after the things of this world won’t help: THOSE THINGS ONLY ALIENATE US FROM GOD. FAITHFUL LOVE HUMBLES US AND MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD. So please, this morning, let’s surrender our lives to Jesus as our Lord and as our Savior.

I hope you can hear that this is where my passion is for life … to win people for Jesus Christ … to set people free from fear, anxiety, and sin. We’re not as big as some of these mega-churches, but I’m reminded of this story.

As an old man walked along the beach at dawn, he noticed a young man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Finally catching up with the youth, he asked him why he was doing this. The boy answered, “The stranded starfish will die if left until the morning sun.”

“But the beach goes on for miles … and there are millions of starfish,” countered the old man. “How can your effort make any difference at all?”

The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it to the safety of the waves. “It makes a difference to this one,” he said.

I don’t know how you got here this morning, but I do know this. You made a difference to God and the person who brought you here. Where are you in your relationship with God this morning?