

Text: Rev 2.1-7  
St Stephen's

Sept 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004  
Sat PM/Sun AM

## **“Renewing Your Purpose”**

### **Resumption: Rejoining the Path of Obedience**

In **1989**, the University of **Michigan** played its conference rival **Wisconsin** in **basketball**. It was a close game, and Michigan trailed by a single point with only seconds remaining. That was when Michigan's All-American guard **Rumeal Robinson** stepped to the foul line for two shots.

It was the scenario every player dreams about. Robinson had the opportunity to be a hero; he had the game in his hands. If he simply hit one foul shot, he could tie the game and send it into overtime. If he put both shots through the net, his team would have an exciting win.

Robinson **missed** the first shot. Then he missed the second. Wisconsin's players ran off the court shouting with joy – they had upset the heavily favored Michigan Wolverines. And Rumeal Robinson was left standing at the line, hanging his head. Under pressure, with the game on the line, he had **failed**, and in something so simple and fundamental.

**Why?** It was the kind of question that could haunt the rest of his days. Some athletes never recover from the failure of a big game...

Athletes are not the only people who face challenges like that. For 2 months we've been looking at the **Church in Ephesus**. It was one of the greatest of the early churches Paul planted. They were **white hot for God**. In their own generation they won thousands of people to Christ, started a number of daughter churches, became an international missions center...

But then spin **forward 30-34 years**. The risen Lord Jesus appears to John and sends a msg to them...

*“I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

*Rev 2:4,5*

The fire had cooled. Their passion had been lost. They were on the foul line with the game in the balance. It is all too easy to lose your passion and your purpose. Jesus taught a lot about this...

## **People Can Lose Their Passion and Purpose When...**

### **They Face Real Worries**

*“The seed cast in the weeds is the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it.”*

Matt 13:22 (The Message)

**You get into serving Christ.** You put hours into a ministry. You give generously. But then you worry about it. Everyone around you is going after more. You worry about it and lose your focus. Your impact gets strangled. Or it can happen when...

### **They Face Real Opposition**

*“The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy... At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word.”*

Matt 13:20-21 (NLT)

**Persecution in the mainline churches.** Churches reeling from the impact of last year's convention. Will we lose our passion and our purpose?

### **They Face a Real Enemy**

*“When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn't take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person's heart.”*

Matt 13:19 (The Message)

You start out strong for the Lord. You love the forgiveness and the fresh start. But then you get down the road and the temptations just seem to come out of nowhere. You think, “Where did that come from. I thought I was past that.” But the Evil One is close to your heart, and you can hardly stand up to him at all. You just want to give up. Will you lose your passion and our purpose?

It is natural to withdraw from the game. People are funny, they want the front of the bus, the middle of the road, but they like **the back of the church**. It just breaks God's heart.

St. Stephen's is in the game...but there are a lot of us who do not know the joy yet of full engagement... "Jesus wants you in the fight...in the game..."  
How do you do it?

## **To Recover Your Passion And Purpose You Must...**

### **1) Reduce Your Weight**

- **Simon and Andrew** dropped their nets and changed careers.
- **James and John** left their dad and their family business
- **Matthew and Zaccus**, 2 corrupt tax collectors, dropped their corruption.
- **The wealthy young ruler** could not drop his riches and it broke Jesus' heart to watch the young man walk away. Jesus knew he was walking away from his God-given purpose for his life; he knew he would miss the only passion his heart was made for.

If you are going to maintain you passion and complete your purpose, you have to **travel light**.

*"let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us."*

Heb 12:1 (NLT)

### **What do you need to drop?**

A relationship that drags you down. A habit you need to break. A temptation you need to walk away from. A distraction you need to let go.

Patrick shared last night that he's made a new rule for his days... He loves golf. Maybe too much. no golf reading, no swinging, no golf thinking in the morning before he meets with God or goes to work.

If you are going to maintain you passion and complete your purpose, you have to **travel light**.

### **2) Embrace Your Ministry**

My concern late last year that our church had plateaued. I felt God challenging me. "Will you settle for this?" I challenged the staff and Vestry. We took it to God in prayer and heard Him telling us to press on. Set "larger than you can ever do on your own" growth targets.

Every ministry pushing forward, reaching out...

**Overview** of the ministries of St. Stephen's fall.

“Tough Questions – Real Answers” series

Welcome visitors and members

Life in the Spirit Seminar

New Leadership Teams for our Children's, Youth and Pastoral Care

Ministries...

**You are needed.**

A lot of church members who are singing "Standing on the Promises" are just sitting on the premises. **You are needed.**

*This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.*

2 Ti 1:6 (NLT)

Your part won't always be easy! Ministry requires long hours, gruntwork, tears, anxiety, prayer, fasting, planning and long discussions. It requires a readiness to let God get ahold of you and reshape you. But your ministry is important. Take it back to the Lord. Ask him to rekindle it. Consecrate it again to him...

Small group... children's or youth... worship... outreach...

### **3) Fire Up Your Heart**

**The church in Ephesus.** Today the lampstand has been removed. The church is a historic monument in Muslim lands. Their witness is a memory. Why? They lost their passion. They lost their purpose. That can happen to people. It can happen to churches.

*“I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

*Rev 2:1-7 (NIV)*

*Look how far you have fallen from your first love! Turn back to me again and work as you did at first.*

Rev 2:5 (NLT)

## **Go back to the basics.**

**Rumeal Robinson** did. When he missed those two foul shots he put his disappointment into action. He showed up at the next practice, played hard, then remained on the court afterward to shoot **one hundred foul shots all by himself**. For the rest of the season, that was his daily regimen – one hundred foul shots after every practice. He went **back to the basics**.

At the end of that season, Rumeal Robinson found himself standing at the foul line again. This time there were **three seconds remaining** in overtime in the national championship game against Seton Hall. Both shots fell easily through the net. Michigan won the NCAA crown.

Today, few remember Robinson's two missed shots against Wisconsin early in the season. But every Wolverine fan remembers the two graceful ones that brought home the championship. It all happened because Rumeal Robinson felt his failure deeply enough to **return to the fundamentals** – the things he did when he first loved basketball. He went **back to the basics so he could make a difference in the game**.

Make a commitment...

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Eph 2:10

**To renew my passion and purpose for Jesus, these next 90 days I will:**

- Make a commitment to daily put Christ first, read Scripture and pray.
- Get involved in a small group.
- Give myself wholeheartedly to a ministry of the church for 90 days
- Give sacrificially (over and above my regular giving) for a particular ministry, mission, or project that advances Christ's gospel.
- Pray for \_\_\_\_\_ and invite him/her/them to the upcoming "Tough Questions-Straight Answers" series.

## Wandering, Not Lost *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

250 years ago, Robert Robinson became a Christian when he was 17, through the influence of the great preacher George Whitefield. He later entered the ministry to serve Christ with great love and devotion.

But Robinson was an honest man, too, and he acknowledged **a difficult truth** about himself. His love for Jesus was deep but **not dependable**. At times his **passion for God waned**, and the well of his **devotion ran dry**. Sometimes he **felt nothing** at all for His Lord.

This cold truth troubled Robinson. He grappled with it, began to write out his thoughts and feelings, and finally produced a timeless hymn. *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* is his story. (verse 3)

As time moved on and Robinson grew older, he **wandered farther** and farther from God. His actions and attitudes began to darken, and he himself had become too great to be reconciled. Corruption had taken root in his life. How could he ever look into the eyes of Jesus again? Robert Robinson was a miserable man, consumed by the grief of his own guilt. He took to the road. Perhaps some distant land would hold the cure. Perhaps he could somehow leave his self-condemnation behind.

One day, in the midst of his journeys, a young lady was seated across from him in a **stagecoach**. She was filled with the joy of Christ and could talk of nothing else. Robinson, of course, would have chosen any other topic available. But he was a captive audience; he could not, obviously, leap out of a moving carriage. So he resigned himself to a discussion of spiritual matters. In those days, people used **hymnals as devotional books**, and this young lady had such a volume in her lap. She said, “*Sir, I’d like your opinion on one of these hymns – one that has been such a powerful influence in my life.*” And she handed the hymnal across to him.

Robinson looked at the page and found himself confronted with **his own words**. His throat ran dry and he could think of nothing to say. He tried to hand the book back to her; great **tears** slid down his face. But slowly the realization dawned on her that she was looking into the countenance of **a tortured soul**.

Robinson saw that she knew the truth. He began to nod slowly, then the words finally followed: “I am the man who wrote that hymn,” he said. “**Many years ago, I’d give anything to experience that joy again – anything.**”

The woman was shocked. The young lady pointed to the lines he knew so well. She began to speak gently about the “**streams of mercy, never ceasing**” that were still deep enough to drown his tears. She showed him there were no seasons too lengthy, no distance too great for the love of God to find him, comfort him, and fire his passion for Christ again.