

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

The motion picture, *The Passion of the Christ*, produced and directed by Mel Gibson, provokes many thoughts about perhaps the most important event in the history of the world, the death of Christ. "Passion" is from the Latin *patior*, and has three different but related meanings. It can mean "a strong feeling"—someone addresses an audience with great "passion," and couples are said to be "passionately" in love. Passion can mean "suffering"—we talk of being a "patient" in a hospital. Being "patient" also means to endure something for a long time, especially adversity. The suffering and death of Christ has long been called "the passion" because of the suffering which Jesus Christ endured in His crucifixion and the strong feelings which this arouses. Witnesses commonly report absolute silence in theaters at the end of Gibson's film. With this kind of reaction, let us consider what the Bible truly says about the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Who Killed The Lord Jesus Christ?

Mel Gibson's film has motivated speculation about who killed the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament clearly teaches that no man took His life, but He freely gave it. In John 10:15-18, before Jesus died, He said, "The Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep . . . therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Of course, that does not mean that no one was guilty for murdering Him, even as Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye [the Jewish nation] have taken, and by wicked hands [the Roman government] have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

The death of Jesus Christ was part of the eternal plan of God. God alone forgives sin and does this by means of an acceptable blood sacrifice. Hebrews 9:22 says that "without shedding of blood is no remission." Man's redemption from sin came "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world. . . ." (1 Pet 1:19,20). God was never satisfied with animal sacrifices in the Old Testament; they were only shadows of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:4-6 reads, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore, when [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure." In the plan of God, ever before Jesus came to earth, God the Father prepared a human body for His eternal Son as the only offering that would please Him. Matthew 20:28 reads, "Even as the Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many." Since the Christ came to give His life, on the cross the Lord Jesus cried out to His Father, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). In every description of His death, the Gospels say, "[He] gave up the ghost" (Mk. 15:37; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30). Why would God the Father plan to offer His Son as a sacrifice for sin? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16,17).

Did anyone, then, take Jesus' life? Neither the Jews nor the Romans did. Christ gave Himself

for His people (Mt. 1:21), friends (John 15:13), sheep (John 10:15), church (Eph. 5:23-26, Acts 20:28), for many (Mt. 20:28; 26:28; Mk. 10:45), all (1 Tim 2:6), the world (Jn 3:16), and "me" (Gal. 2:20). The Father sent Him and He voluntarily gave His life as an acceptable sacrifice for sin. Even though no man took His life, people generally rejoiced in but rejected the meaning of His death, and they continue to do so today. To trust in works, rituals, or religion instead of His substitutionary death and sacrificially shed blood for salvation is to ". . . [tread] under foot the Son of God, and [count] the blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing . . ." (Heb 10: 29), since "if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal 2:21).

Why Did the Lord Jesus Christ Die?

He died as a substitute for sinful men. Hebrews 2:9: "he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

He died in your place and mine; He became our Substitute. No truth is more basic to the gospel. Ezekiel warned that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze 18:4). Romans 6:23 repeats the truth that "the wages of sin is death." Sin requires death, without exception. Left to his own resources, then, man has no prospect but death. God, however, has another plan—a Substitute to take the punishment of man on Himself, to die in his place. Christ humbled Himself (Php. 2:5-8), came to earth, and died in our place. Romans 5:8 puts it this way: "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Galatians 3:13 states, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

He died as the Captain of man's salvation. Hebrews 2:10: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Jesus had to become a Man and He had to suffer and die in order to be the provider of salvation. The idea of the word "captain" is "someone who involves others in his endeavor." Through His death and resurrection, He opened the way of salvation to anyone who would believe in Him. In John 14:19, He said, "because I live, ye shall live also." The Lord can lead us safely to heaven. As the Captain of salvation, "Jesus said . . . I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

He died to conquer the works of Satan. Hebrews 2:14,15: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Christ's death destroyed Satan and his weapons of physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. Satan knew that God's Law demanded death for our sin. Satan knew that men, if they remained as they were, would die and spend eternity in hell. Satan wants to hold onto men until they die, because once they are dead their opportunity for salvation is gone forever (Heb 9:27). Death terrifies people more than anything else. When we receive Jesus Christ, we are released from bondage to the fear of death, and, instead, actually look forward to it. We say with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Php 1:21). Death no longer holds any fear, for it simply brings us into the presence of our Lord. That is why Paul wrote, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:55-57).

He died to obtain eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The Lord Jesus died and shed His blood as a sacrifice for sin only once, since that one act was sufficient for the human race in all ages. In so doing, He obtained permanent, eternal redemption for the saved. Redemption is His act of setting man free from his bondage to sin and its punishment. He cleansed all past, present, and future sins of His people in one act of redemption. This demonstrates that no one washed in Christ's blood can ever again be lost; once he is saved, he is always saved, for Christ promised His own that "they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (Jn 10:28-29). "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate [believers] from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Once the penalty for a man's sins is paid through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, God will not ask for a double payment from the redeemed soul; if Christ frees you from the curse of the Law through His suffering, you cannot suffer the curse in hell yourself. The Savior provides a truly eternal redemption.

He died to cleanse our conscience from dead works. Hebrews 9:13,14: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The Old Testament animal sacrifices could at best cleanse a man's outside, rendering him ceremonially prepared to participate in the corporate worship of Israel. These sacrifices cleansed only symbolically and temporarily, but the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ provided genuine cleansing for our conscience. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ replaces the believer's old life with a new one, and so radically changes his nature. In Christ we are not cleaned up old persons, but new redeemed creatures. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." One who has not been delivered from his old life, ways, and sins by the blood of Christ, and been given a new and supernatural love for and characteristic walk of holiness, is lost and has never truly received Christ's cleansing sacrifice.

He died to put away man's sins forever. Hebrews 9:24-28: "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of the Christ*, propagates the Catholic Mass. In interviews, the director has mentioned that he regularly took the Mass to make sure that he was "squeaky clean" in making the film. Sections of the movie evoke the teaching. In holding to the doctrine of the Mass, the supposed perpetual offering of Christ in its ceremonies, Roman Catholicism and its adherents reject the power and significance of Christ's one and only true sacrifice on the cross. This false doctrine is plainly reflected in the crucifix, the symbol of Roman Catholicism; Jesus is portrayed as still crucified. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (part 1367) reads, "In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner." In the Mass, the piece of bread held by

the priest is blasphemously held to literally become Jesus Christ. The priest idolatrously bows down and worships this bread and sacrifices "Christ" again to allegedly help pay for sin. "By the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the Lord . . . worship of the Eucharist [the bread the priest blesses] . . . In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ by . . . bowing deeply as a sign of adoration to the Lord" (part 1376, 1378, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

God, however, clearly says in Hebrews 9:24-28 that Christ's death is once and for all; He was only offered once, just like men only die once, and because His one offering is enough to eternally cleanse from all sin, He does not have to offer Himself often. Not believing this is not trusting in Christ, but in a fraudulent and man-made system of religious ritual. Furthermore, Hebrews 10:11,12 says, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Christ's sacrifice took away the sins of all believers for all time. Thus, He perfected them forever, so that God will never again remember their sins, or ask for any further offering for them: "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified . . . their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:14-18).

1 John 2:2 calls Christ's death a "propitiation." This term means that God is appeased and that He does not deal any further in righteous anger with those who receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. The sins of believers were permanently propitiated through His death on the cross. In addition, Col 1:21, 22, Rom 5:10, and 2 Cor 5:18-20 speak of reconciliation: this term means that those who were God's enemies and separated from Him are actually brought back into a relationship of friendship and fellowship with Him.

He died to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Psalm 22:14-17: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me." Isaiah 52:14: "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:" Isaiah 53:5,6: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." These are all Old Testament prophecies about the future suffering of Jesus Christ.

God gave a glimpse of the intensity of Christ's suffering, the costliness of our redemption, and specific details of His death centuries before they occurred. Notice in Psalm 22 Christ's ravaged body (v. 14), His parching thirst (v. 15), the dogs (a term of contempt for the wicked, here the Roman soldiers) that surrounded Him (v. 16), the pierced hands and feet (v. 16), and the spectacle of mocking bystanders (v. 17). His face was distorted from the pain He bore. His form was bowed and disfigured with the burden He suffered. His frame was disjointed through His agony. His suffering caused His countenance to be so marred that it had no appearance of any human form or beauty. Indeed, His humiliation and suffering were more than those of any other man, for He bore the wrath of God for our sins on the cross, a burden far greater than that of all His suffering at the hands of men. He was "wounded," wounded to death, and "bruised," that is, crushed by the heavy burden of sin and

weighted by the wrath of God. Through His suffering for others they obtain mercy; it is a chastisement that leads to peace or reconciliation. He was beaten with stripes, wounds that cut in, and "by His stripes," His wounds, healing was brought to us. The prophesied "stripes" were fulfilled when He was whipped. The Roman soldiers were not attempting to fulfill prophecy, but they did do so in the sovereign will of God.

Why Was the Death So Brutal?

Roman crucifixion was a brutal death penalty. The Romans meant to discourage rebellion against their authority. However, this manner of death for Christ also necessarily:

- 1.) Fulfilled Old Testament predictions, which spoke of Christ's crucifixion before this form of execution even existed.
- 2.) Provided for a bloody, sacrificial death to pay for sin (Colossians 1:20; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7).
- 3.) Revealed both the wrath of God against sin and His love for mankind. Isaiah 53:10 states, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief . . . thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin . . ."
- 4.) Left an example of bearing suffering for those who follow His steps (1 Pet 2:21).

Why "the" Christ, and not just Christ?

"Christ," one of the titles of the Lord Jesus, means "Anointed One." It means that He is the King, the Messiah. As "the" Christ, He is the only Messiah and King. He will save His people, leading them from sin and death to righteousness and life in His holy kingdom. Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Lord Jesus Christ excluded all other means of access to heaven when He said in John 10, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep . . . I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture . . . he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and robber" (vv. 1, 7, 9).

"The" Christ is not any other man, such as Buddha, Joseph Smith, Confucius, the Pope, or Jesus' human mother, Mary, nor is He false religion, such as Islam, Roman Catholicism and every other form of false "Christianity," Hinduism, the New Age movement, atheism, humanism, or agnosticism. Salvation comes through His death and shed blood alone. Ephesians 2:18 reads, "For through him we both [Israel and non-Jews] have access by one Spirit unto the Father." How? "But now in Jesus Christ ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph 2:13, 16). The only way into God's presence is through Jesus Christ; every other way leads to hell. If you try to get to heaven through your own efforts or religious system, Galatians 5 says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law . . . Christ shall profit you nothing" (Gal. 5: 2, 4).

"The" Christ is the Christ of the Bible, the Son of the everlasting Father, who, with the Holy Spirit, constitute the three eternal Persons of the one true God (1 Jn 5:7). He is not the "Christ" of a movie, an image, an icon, or an idol. The "Christ" of Mel Gibson's film itself is not Christ. Images of God are forbidden in the ten commandments (Exodus 20:4), so pictures of the Son of God are

idolatry. The Lord Jesus Christ was a real Person, a Jewish man in the line of David, who lived on earth, died, and rose again bodily from the grave nearly 2000 years ago, but He is also God the Son (John 1:1-3). Images of Christ of necessity misrepresent this One who is "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16), in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). The New Testament maintains a deafening silence about His appearance and other physical characteristics during His earthly ministry. Portraying Him with long hair, as in the movie, specifically contradicts the Bible and blasphemously asserts Him a sinner (1 Cor 11:14). The Biblical Jesus is the only Jesus, and He is the One you must know and follow, since He said "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Jn 17:3). To change "the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man" (Rom 1:23) is to accept a Satanic counterfeit and bring eternal ruin.

What Is the Right Response to the Passion of the Christ?

1.) *Recognize that Christ died for your sin.* You are a wicked sinner, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). You are "as an unclean thing, and all [your] righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Is 64:6). You have no goodness in yourself, since "none is good, save one, that is, God" (Lu 18:19). Romans 7:18 says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . ." You deserve hell, for your "damnation is just" (Rom 3:8-9). Christ, however, "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Pet 2:24). 1 Timothy 1:15 reads, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

2.) *Do not rely on yourself, your works, or a religion to save you from sin and hell.* Romans 4:2-5: "For if Abraham were justified [declared righteous] by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Galatians 2:16 states, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Salvation, receiving Christ, is by belief or faith alone, for "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood (your lineage), nor of the will of the flesh (your works), nor of the will of man (your religion), but of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

3.) *Believe in Him as God, Lord, and Savior to receive eternal life through His death.* John 10:10-11: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Repent, that is, turn from your way to His way, leaving your sin and your life for eternal life in Him (Lk. 13:3,5). The Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:34-36).

Hebrews 2:3 warns, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" With His brutal,

bloody sacrificial death on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ provided eternal salvation for all who would receive it. If you reject Him, the Lord will say to you, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Turn from yourself and your way to Him, surrendering your life and trusting in Him alone for forgiveness, and He will save you. Believe on Him, and, based on His death and shed blood, you will be counted righteous before the holy God. Come to Christ today in repentance and faith, and be saved by His passion; tomorrow it may be too late. "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." (Prov 27:1).

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