

INTRODUCTION

How many of you have seen *The Passion of the Christ*? Today, I want to share with you the message and the man behind the movie. I'm not talking about Mel Gibson either. Although, I admire him for having the brave heart to produce a movie that teaches our sin was the lethal weapon that killed God's lovely Son.

Have you thought about the current cultural context in which *The Passion* started showing? I'm amazed at God's timing. In the space of one short month, we have experienced both the worst and best of what media has to offer. We started February with shock and outrage at the pornographic filth of MTV's Super Bowl half-time show. It was broadcast around the planet. After seeing it, you can understand why the Muslim world calls America "The Great Satan." They think that kind of garbage is acceptable behavior in America—and sadly, some of us who object to it have remained silent for too long.

On February 12, Georgia Senator Zel Miller spoke to the U.S. Senate in support of a Constitutional Amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. He also was endorsing the Liberties Restoration Act which declares religious liberty rights in several ways including the Pledge to the American Flag and the public display of the Ten Commandments.

During his twelve minute speech, he said: "Yes, there is a deficit to be concerned about in this country, it is a deficit of decency." He said, "The Culture of Far Left America was displayed in a startling way during the Super Bowl's now infamous half-time show. A show brought to us courtesy of the pagan temple of Viacom-Babylon."

He continued, "How many of you have ever run over a skunk with your car? I have many times and I can tell you, the stink stays around for a long time. You can take the car through a car wash and it's still there. So the scent of this event will long linger in the nostrils of America." He referred to the raunchy Janet/Justin exposure, but Senator Miller reserved his strongest outrage for another half-time incident. He said, "But as bad as all this was, the thing that yanked my chain the hardest was seeing that ignoramus with his pointed head stuck up through a hole he had cut in the flag of the United States of America, screaming about having 'a bottle of scotch and watching lots of *****.' This is the same flag that we pledge allegiance to. This is the flag that is draped over coffins of young uniformed warriors killed while protecting Kid Crock's bony behind. He should be tarred and feathered, and ridden out of this country on a rail. Talk about a good reality show, there's one for you."

In addition to the shock of the Super Bowl, over the past few weeks, there have been several hundred illegal homosexual marriages performed in cities across America. At the precise moment when we're in the middle of a national discussion about morality, a movie is released that is the most powerful visual portrayal of the death of Jesus Christ ever produced. Suddenly more people are talking publicly about Jesus Christ than ever before! I marvel at the impeccable timing of God! First, He allows us to see just how depraved we really are, and then He shows us a love story about how He deals with our sin.

There have been many unfavorable movie reviews about *The Passion of the Christ*, but I think the best review can be found in one verse of scripture: I Peter 3:18: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." As we consider the Man and the Message behind the movie, let's notice four things about Jesus:

1. RELATE TO THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

Because we affirm that Jesus was God in the flesh, we sometimes overlook His humanity. Jesus wasn't 50% human and 50% Divine. He was 100% human and 100% Divine. Because He was fully human, we can relate to His humanity in three ways:

1. Physical sensations

First, Jesus experienced physical sensations identical to ours. Some Christians assume Jesus was immune to some of the same physical feelings we have. But the Bible teaches Jesus felt exactly the way we feel. He got hungry and tired. For instance, we read in John 4:6: "He came to a town in Samaria ... Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well." (John 4:6) When you face fatigue and it seems like you will drop if you don't stop and rest, you can know that Jesus experienced that same physical sensation. He had to eat, drink, and sleep to care for His body.

2. Emotional devastation

Second, Jesus experienced emotional devastation—just like we do. He faced the emotional pain of being rejected by the very people He came to save. The Pharisees claimed He got His power from Satan! They chided Him about the identity of His father. He dealt with anger when He saw the temple merchants cheating the people. He faced disappointment and sorrow as He faced the cross. He faced the emotional pain of rejection and betrayal. Even His closest friends left Him when He was arrested.

3. Spiritual temptation

Third, in His humanity, Jesus faced spiritual temptation. The writer of Hebrews tells us Jesus was tempted at all points like we are; yet He never sinned. He didn't have some divine firewall that prevented the devil from whispering in His ear. He wasn't immune to temptation—He had to face it and gain victory over it just like each of us do.

2. EXPERIENCE A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

Jesus had many personal relationships throughout His life and ministry. Of course, His love and devotion to His mother was without equal. When Jesus was eight days old, Mary and Joseph took Him into the temple to make an offering. An old prophet, Simeon, recognized Him as the Messiah and told Mary, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that shall be spoken against, do that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul." (Luke 2:34-35)

As Mary watched the suffering of Jesus, surely she remembered those words as a sword of anguish pierced her soul. What good mother wouldn't want to take the pain of their child?

Jesus had relationships with His disciples, too. You can tell from the Last Supper that He had a deep and genuine love for them—although He knew they were far from perfect. These were just regular guys who were confused, scared and baffled by what was happening to Jesus.

Jesus even developed relationships on the way to the cross. Malchus was a servant of Caiaphas who came with the mob to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had been convinced that Jesus was a dangerous imposter who had to be stopped. When Malchus attempted to take Jesus, Simon Peter hacked his ear off. While crazy pandemonium swirled around Him, Jesus calmly looked at Malchus and then tenderly replaced his ear. Malchus must have realized at that moment who Jesus really was.

When Jesus fell beneath the cross, Simon of Cyrene picked it up and spent some time getting to know Jesus. Even when He was dying, Jesus cared enough to develop a relationship with one of the criminals. The criminal admitted he was guilty and then he made a tremendous profession of faith. He looked over at a man who was so beaten he hardly appeared human, and said, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” There was just a hint of a smile as Jesus said, “I tell you TODAY, you will be with me in paradise.”

Jesus is still entering into personal relationships with people. He is not just some historical character confined to the pages of textbooks. He is real and you can *know* Him.

Do you know Jesus? I didn't ask you if you know *about* Him. I didn't even ask you if you believe in Him. I believe in Mel Gibson and James Caviziel, and I know about them. But I don't know them, because I've never met them. But I know Jesus personally, because I have met Him!

As far as we know, the Apostle Paul never met Jesus in the flesh, but later Jesus appeared to Him in a vision. From that time on, Paul wrote repeatedly about knowing Jesus. In Philippians 3:8 he wrote: “I consider everything a loss compared with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ.” It's not a religion—it's a relationship. You can know Jesus, and when you do, you will realize that the value of that relationship.

3. UNDERSTAND THE SUFFERING OF JESUS

At this point in the message, I'm going to ask our worship hosts to distribute your Passion Memento. They are passing out nails to you, and I'd like each person to take one—and take only one, please. Now, these nails aren't like the ones used on Jesus, but they will help us understand something about the suffering of Jesus in a few minutes.

1. It was vicious

There are three words that will help you understand the suffering of Jesus, and they all start with the letter "V." First the suffering of Jesus was vicious. Some critics of this movie have claimed it contains too much "gratuitous" violence. That adjective is often used for movies that are violent, but most people really don't know what the word "gratuitous" means. It means "unwarranted or unnecessary." I can see how that word can be applied to some Hollywood horror flicks, but I don't think it's an appropriate word for *The Passion*.

From my years of study concerning Roman crucifixion, I'm prepared to say *The Passion* comes closest to portraying the brutality and horror of scourging and crucifixion. But, for the sake of decency, it *still* falls short of the full brutality of what really happened. Special effects and make up can't reflect the hideous effects of being beaten with metal balls embedded in the ends of leather thongs. Just ask any ER physician or State Trooper how much blood the human body is able of spilling and you'll realize the movie was tempered in that respect. And there is ample documentation that the Romans stripped prisoners nude for the scourging and crucifixion to add to their shame. As bad as the graphic torture was, I came away thinking we had been spared from the full horror of it.

2. It was voluntary

The second word to understand the suffering of Jesus was voluntary. Jesus wasn't just the victim of a religious mob; He voluntarily endured the agony and suffering He faced. In a powerful Messianic prophecy from the Old Testament, Jesus said, "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." (Isaiah 50:6)

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden, Peter tried to rescue Him. Jesus told him to put away his sword. In Matthew 26:53 Jesus said, "Do you think I cannot call my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" That's about 72,000 warrior angels. In Isaiah 37:36 says *one* angel killed 185,000 Syrian soldiers in one night—pull out your calculator. That means twelve legions of angels could wipe out 13 billion soldiers...no contest! And I imagine as Jesus was being beaten and tortured the angels of heaven were poised with their swords drawn waiting and hoping the Father would say, "Go get my Son!" But Jesus endured scourging and the shame and pain because He loves you.

3. It was vicarious

The third word to help you understand the suffering of Jesus is vicarious. You may not be familiar with the word. The dictionary definition of vicarious is "endured or done by one person substituting for another." Jesus suffered because we needed a substitute to die for us. One of the most powerful verses in the entire Bible explains what was happening on the cross: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Corinthians 5:21) As we read in I Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." He was the righteous, sinless One. We are the unrighteous, sinful ones. God cannot tolerate sin, so our sin debt had to be paid for before we could ever be brought before God. The only One capable of paying the debt of sin we owed was the only One who didn't have any sin: Jesus. It's because of our sin that we need a Savior.

I've always been fascinated by the lyrics in one of D.C. Talk's songs. One of the verses from "In the Light" says, "The disease of self runs through my blood. It's a cancer fatal to my soul. Every attempt on my behalf has failed—to bring this sickness under control. Tell me, what's going on inside of me? I despise my own behavior. This only serves to confirm my suspicion that I'm still a man in need of a Savior." (D.C. Talk, "In the Light")

It's not just that we *needed* a Savior, past tense. We *need* a Savior right now! Through the vicarious suffering of Jesus we can know God.

Director Mel Gibson was asked how such a violent movie as *The Passion* can bring hope. He responded: "Life is hard and we all get wounded by it. I was no exception. In my thirties, I hit a low point where I was wondering if there was any hope left. I went to the wounds of Christ in order to cure my wounds. And when I did that I began to understand it as I never had before. It was the sacrifice—seeing how much Jesus suffered, not for His own sake, but for my sake. If he loved me that much, how could I not have hope in Him? My wounds were healed by his wounds; I had to tell the story of those wounds." (*Decision Magazine*, March 2004, p.8)

Before you can truly appreciate the wounds of Jesus, you must understand the meaning behind His suffering. The nail I gave to you is to be a reminder of the pain and suffering Jesus endured for you. Take the nail and gently place the point in the palm of your hand and hold it there for about thirty seconds. Don't push too hard—don't break the skin—just apply gentle but firm pressure. You can hold it with your middle finger or use your other hand. But look at it and try to imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to have a nail much larger and longer placed against Hand. And then imagine what it was like to have a huge hammer come crashing down driving the nail straight through the skin and muscle until it came through the back of the hand.

That's what Jesus endured for you, so you wouldn't have to suffer the punishment for your sins. Now remove the nail. Do you see the red scar? Now, I suggest you keep the nail in your Bible or put it in a prominent place in your home or office—somewhere you can see it. And between now and Easter Sunday, why don't you take the nail and just touch your palm with it again and say, "Thank you, Lord for suffering for me." By your wounds I am healed. The nail is to be your reminder of the *love* Jesus has for you.

I don't know about you, but seeing that movie makes me want to live a life of purity. Because I realize that my sin was what killed the Lord. Mel Gibson based much of the script of His movie on the writings of a Christian mystic who lived in the 18th century, Anne Catherine Emmerich. She wrote a book entitled *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is what she wrote about our sin,

"We ought to be ashamed of that weakness which makes us speak without repugnance of those sufferings which our Lord endured so calmly and patiently for our salvation. The horror we feel is as great as that of a murderer who is forced to place his hands upon the wounds he himself has inflicted on his victim.

At the day of judgment, when the most hidden things will be manifested, we shall see the share we have had in the torments endured by the Son of God; we shall see how far we have caused them by the sins we so frequently commit, and which are, in fact, a species of consent which we give to the tortures which were inflicted on Jesus by his cruel enemies.

If, alas! We reflected seriously on this, we should repeat with great fervor the words which we find so often in prayer-books: 'Lord, grant that I may DIE, rather than ever willfully offend thee again by sin.' (*The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*)

4. BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Now I don't like people to give away the endings of movies I haven't seen, but since most of you have already read the book, I'm going to let you know how the movie ends. Jesus died, and His body is removed from the cross and laid in a tomb. But Jesus didn't stay dead. He was raised from the dead!

The resurrection of Jesus is not some mysterious afterthought. The earliest Christians proclaimed it with joy. It wasn't just some mysterious empty tomb either. The Bible says there were several hundred eyewitnesses. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day ... he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time." (I Corinthians 15:3-6)

Yes, I cried at the Passion. I wept when I saw the depth of love Jesus demonstrated for me. I wept for Mary and the pain she must have experienced as she watched her Son suffer. But when the end of the movie came, I wasn't crying. My favorite part was the last twelve seconds. In fact, when I left the theater, I shouted, "HE IS RISEN!" And some folks who weren't too shocked said, "HE IS RISEN, INDEED!" I walked out of that movie wanting to sing!

Yes, He suffered cruelly. Yes, He was nailed to a cross. Yes, He died and was buried. But the glorious truth is "Death could not keep his prey, Jesus my Savior. He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord. Up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain; and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!" (Words by Robert Lowry) And Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives all fear is gone. Because I know He holds my future. And life is worth the living, just because He lives (Words by Bill Gaither).

CONCLUSION

This movie is going to give all of us a greater opportunity to talk to people about Jesus. All you have to say is "What do you think about the movie?" Then listen. Don't get upset if they say things you don't like—just listen. One good way to get into a conversation with them is to ask them a trivia question from the movie. Q: What are the only man-made things in Heaven? Remind them that in order to answer that question they have to look hard in the last five seconds of the movie—it was my favorite part. The Answer? The wounds of Jesus.

After the resurrection, the wounds were still present in the Body of Jesus. On the first Easter night, Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room, but Thomas was absent. Thomas returned after Jesus had gone again, and the other disciples shared their excitement about seeing Jesus. Thomas wasn't convinced. He's like some of you. He wanted *proof*. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it..." (John 20:25) One week later Jesus appeared again, and this time Thomas was present. Jesus said, "Put your finger here; see my hands...stop doubting and believe...Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:27-29). Jesus was talking about me and you there. We haven't ever seen with our physical eyes—but we believe, and we are blessed!

Look at your palm. Chances are the red mark has gone. But just remember, Jesus is still carrying the wounds in His body. He is inviting you to have a personal relationship with Him. There's an old song that says, "Have you failed in your plan of your storm-tossed life? Place your hand in the nail scarred hand. Are you weary and worn from its toil and strife? Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand. Place your hand in the nail scarred hand. Place your hand in the nail scarred hand. He will keep to the end; He's your dearest friend. Place your hand in the nail scarred hand.

The Passion of the Christ is a powerful movie, but it's the *compassion* of the Christ that can change your life. Will you trust Him today?

OUTLINE

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2. Emotional devastation
3. Spiritual temptation

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"I consider everything a loss compared with the surpassing greatness of KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD, for whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Philippians 3:8

3. UNDERSTAND THE SUFFERING OF JESUS

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." Isaiah 50:6

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." II Corinthians 5:21

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes