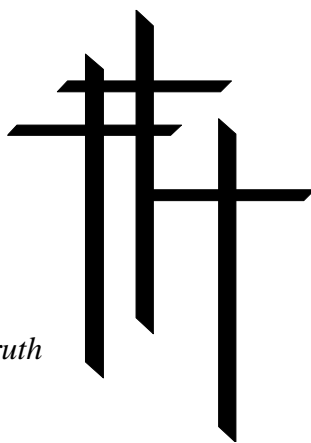


Timely Messenger

*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*



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THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

By Gregg Bing

How would you feel if you knew when you would die? And you knew for your whole life. You even knew how you would die—a slow painful death at the hands of cruel men. And you knew that you would have to face it all alone—forsaken by all those you held dear in life. How would you feel? This is what Jesus Christ experienced in His life on this earth. This was the “passion” of the Christ.

The word “passion” is used in the King James version of Acts 1:3: “To whom also He shewed

Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs.” It comes from the Greek word “pascho” which means “to be affected, to feel, have a sensible experience, to undergo” (*Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon*). In the Greek, the word can be used in a good sense, but in the New Testament it is almost always used in a bad sense, of one’s sufferings, in particular the sufferings of Christ (cf. Matt. 16:21, Acts 3:18, 1 Pet. 3:18). The “passion” of the Christ speaks of the sufferings that Jesus experienced in His life on

earth, especially the sufferings connected with His death on Calvary. How did these sufferings affect Jesus’ life? How did He feel?

The recent movie by Mel Gibson, “The Passion of the Christ,” seeks to allow viewers a more vivid look at what Jesus’ sufferings were like. There are several problems with a movie such as this. For instance, there are several scenes in the movie that have no Scriptural basis. They are, instead, based on extra-Biblical material or are inserted under the guise of “artistic license.” Another problem is that the filmmaker’s own religious slant is often evident. In Gibson’s case, there are many things in the movie that reflect his Catholic beliefs, especially the great emphasis put upon Jesus’ mother, Mary. Finally, in the case of this movie, there is a great deal of graphic violence included. While it may have been an accurate portrayal of the physical sufferings Jesus went through, it tends to downplay the fact that not all of Jesus’ sufferings were physical in nature.

Physical Sufferings

There is no question that Jesus suffered extreme levels of pain and physical suffering. The Romans were very cruel in their treatment of others. Crucifixion, the form of capital punishment used by the Romans, was a most horrible way to die. It was a slow, excruciating death that lasted as long as nine days in some cases (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, page 265). It was considered a curse by the Jews (Deut. 21:23).

Jesus suffered in many different ways physically. He was exhausted from lack of sleep, being awake all night prior to His crucifixion. He was scourged with a whip which left many stripes on His back (Matt. 27:25 with 1 Pet. 2:24). He had a crown of thorns pushed down upon His head (Matt. 27:29). He was beaten on the head with a reed (rod) (Matt. 27:30). He was forced to carry His own cross through the streets of Jerusalem (John 19:17) until He was unable to continue and had to be relieved by

Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32). His hands and feet were pierced as He was nailed to the cross (Psalm 22:16, John 20:25). He hung on the cross for over six hours (Mark 15:25 with Luke 23:44).

As terrible as all this was, the passion of the Christ involved more.

Social Sufferings

Crucifixion was a humiliating experience. It was a punishment reserved for the vilest of criminals, for men such as the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Yet, Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, was "numbered among the transgressors" (Mark 15:27-28).

Crucifixion was also a public spectacle. Jesus was paraded through the streets of Jerusalem to a place outside the city gates, stripped of His garments, and hung in open shame upon the cross (John 19:23).

For Jesus, the humiliation was made worse by the insults and taunts of the Jewish leaders, the Roman soldiers, the two thieves crucified with Him, even

the people who just passed by the place of crucifixion (Matt. 27:39-44).

This would have been a humiliating experience for any man, but how much more for the Son of God. Yet, even this shame was not the full extent of Jesus' sufferings.

Emotional Sufferings

Though Jesus Christ is very God Himself, He "became flesh" and lived on this earth as a Man. The sufferings He went through were emotionally draining on Him, personally. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the emotional nature of Christ's sufferings.

"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." (Isa. 53:3)

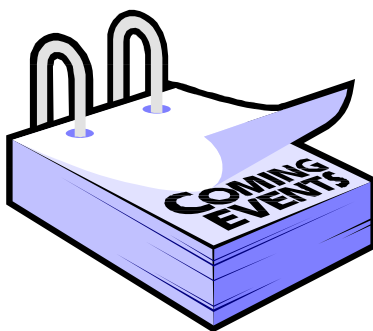
The Lord Jesus Christ "came unto His own and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). His own nation, Israel, rejected

Him, but so did the Gentiles, who were also His own, for He created them. Those whom He loved so much, despised and rejected Him, and all without a cause (John 15:25). People hid their faces from Him; they looked at Him with utter contempt, counting Him as nothing. No doubt, such hatred and rejection brought great sorrow and grief to the Lord Jesus personally, especially knowing that by rejecting Him they brought spiritual judgment upon themselves.

Think how painful it must have been for Jesus when Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed Him into the hands of the Jewish leaders. When Judas led the arresting party into Gethsemane, you can almost hear the pain in Jesus' words to him: "Friend, why have you come?"

The twelve apostles were Jesus' closest friends. While Judas was the only one to betray Him, after Jesus was arrested in the garden, all of them "forsook Him and fled" (Matt. 26:56).

Later, during Jesus'
(Continued on page 6)



July 5-9, 2004

Family Bible Camp

Our Family Bible Camp will be held at North Texas Baptist Conference Center (Camp Copass) in Denton, Texas on July 5-9, 2004.

This camp is for all ages with separate classes for preschoolers (ages 0-5), pre-juniors (ages 6-8), juniors (ages 9-12), young people (ages 13 through college age), and adults. Children under 9 years of age must stay with a parent or guardian.

The theme this year is: "To Know the Love of Christ." See the registration and information form included in this issue for more information. **Deadline** for turning in registration forms is **Sunday, June 20, 2004.**

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Gregg Bing — Editor

Sent **free** to anyone upon request. If you live in the Fort Worth area, we invite you to worship with us.

Sunday Services:

10:00 AM Sunday School

11:00 AM Morning Worship

6:00 PM Evening Worship

Mid-Week Services:

Tues. 10:00 AM Ladies Class

Wed. 7:00 PM Bible Study

ADDRESS CHANGED?

If so, please notify Grace Bible Church. Be sure to include your name, your old address, and your new address. This will help us keep our mailing list current and reduce the cost of postage.

*Thanks for your help
in this matter!*

THE HOPE OF OUR CALLING

By Jim Roberts

The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus whom God had called as a pastor over the Church which is the Body of Christ. In Chapter 2 Paul said:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” (Titus 2:11-15)

Paul was reminding Titus that the hope of Abraham had passed away. No longer were believers to look for the heavenly city of God to come down to the earth (Hebrews 11:16), but believers were to rejoice in the hope of their calling, namely, the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Paul taught the believers at Colosse that:

“When Christ who is our life appears,

then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)

Paul explained to Titus that all believers today share this same hope for the grace of God has now appeared to all men. However, Paul knew that this message had to be taught with zeal for it was a new message. The program for the Church had been kept as a secret in the heart and mind of God since before the creation itself. Therefore, Paul told Titus to “speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority.” Paul told the Ephesians about this great hope and was very concerned that they understand the importance of the message. He prayed:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” (Ephesians 1:17-18)

In Ephesians 1:14, Paul referred to the catching up of the Church, the Body of Christ, as the redemption of Christ’s purchased possession.

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14)

According to Ephesians 1:7, we already have spiritual redemption through His blood, but we are waiting for the redemption of our bodies which will occur at the appearing of the Lord and the rapture of the Church.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

The Church which is the Body of Christ is the purchased possession which is now waiting for its final redemption. In the mean time, we live on this earth learning how to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, all to the praise of the glory of His grace.

“An Informal Survey of the New Testament” by R.B. Shiflet will be continued next month.

MY NEED

I thought I needed many things
Along life's toilsome way,
When days were long and heavy cares
Left scarcely time to pray.

I thought I needed many things
For those I held most dear,
When they were sad and longed for rest
Or change of portion here.

When it was Thee, I needed Lord,
To satisfy my heart,
To fill my days with rest and peace,
And every grace impart.

And those I loved but needed Thee,
Not change of scene or place,
But faith just now, through sun or shade
Thy loving hand to trace.

Just Thee alone, My blessed Lord,
For every time and place;
Just Thee alone — until we all
Shall see Thee face to face.

— Grace E. Troy

But my God shall
supply all your need
according to His riches in
glory by Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)

(Continued from page 3)
interrogation by Caiaphas, Peter, who was waiting outside in the courtyard, denied Jesus three times, saying, “I do not know the Man” (Matt. 26:74). This was the same Peter who earlier had vowed, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Matt. 26:35). Think of the pain Jesus must have felt when the cock crowed and He turned to look at Peter (Luke 22:61).

The emotional suffering were part of what “troubled” Jesus’ soul (John 12:27). Still, as painful as it was for Jesus to be rejected by men and forsaken by those closest to Him, it could not begin to compare with what He experienced His last three hours on the cross.

Spiritual Sufferings

The final three hours Jesus hung on the cross were shrouded by a darkness over all the land. What did this darkness signify? Some feel that it indicated that Satan, the “power of darkness,” was at work. More likely, the darkness

pictured God’s judgment upon sins—our sins! While Jesus hung there on that cross, in particular for those last three hours, He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). This One who “knew no sin” was “made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter described it this way:

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” (1 Pet. 3:18)

Christ “suffered” for our sins. This was the ultimate passion of the Christ—the pain, the feelings He experienced while bearing the sins of the world on that cross. Just think how this holy and righteous person, the very God of glory, would be affected by even one sin, much less the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). For on that cross, for those three terrible hours, our sins became His. When He

died, the Lord Jesus Christ paid in full the debt that we owed (Rom. 6:23). Not just physical death, though that was required: “for without shedding of blood there is no remission” (forgiveness of sins) (Heb. 9:22); Jesus also experienced spiritual death for us as well, being separated from His Father in heaven.

About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying,

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46)

The depth of Jesus’ anguish during this time is seen in the question He asked: “Why?” Why had the Father completely and utterly forsaken His Son on that cross? The answer is found in the 22nd Psalm.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are

holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed. But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.” (Psalm 22:1-6)

What a vivid picture this passage gives us of Jesus’ death on the cross and His spiritual sufferings. Earlier on the cross, Jesus had called Him “Father,” but here His anguished cry was to “My God, My God,” asking, “Why have You forsaken Me?” “Why are you so far from helping Me?” Why do I “cry out in the daytime, but You do not hear?” The answer to these piercing questions is twofold. Verse three of Psalm 22 declares of God, “But You are holy.” A holy and righteous God simply cannot look upon sin (Hab. 1:13). Then in verse six of Psalm 22, Christ says of Himself, “But I am a worm and no man.” Why would He describe Himself this

way? Because bearing our sins on the cross, this is what He was to a holy God: a worm and no man, one that God must turn away from.

How can we even begin to understand the depth of Christ’s spiritual sufferings? As I thought about Mel Gibson’s focus on the violent death and physical sufferings that Christ experienced, I began to wonder why Jesus had to suffer such a cruel and painful death physically. If Jesus’ spiritual sufferings—His separation from God for our sins—caused Him the greatest pain, then why did He have to endure a death of such excruciating physical pain and public humiliation?

As human beings we are constrained by the finite world we live in. We are limited in our knowledge and understanding of an infinite God. We could never completely understand the reasons for the cross. We can’t truly feel the agony the Lord Jesus Christ experienced being separated from His Father because of our sins. We can’t fully understand the

abomination that sin is to a holy and righteous God or the terrible curse and judgment that sin brings. We can’t fathom the depth of Christ’s love that would lead Him to make such a sacrifice for us, “even while we were still sinners” (Rom. 5:8).

The physical pain, the social humiliation, and the emotional pain that Christ suffered puts Christ’s passion in terms we can more easily understand.

We can identify with Jesus’ humiliation and shame, for we know what it means to suffer shame. As we think of the shame Jesus experienced while hanging on that cursed cross, it helps us understand the shame of sin.

We can identify with Jesus’ rejection by men, being despised and counted as nothing, for we have experienced rejection and hatred from people at times in our own lives. This helps us, at least a little, to understand what Jesus experienced when He was rejected by His own Father.

We can identify with Jesus’ excruciating physical pain. We can imagine

the pain of the whip, the crown of thorns, and the nails, for we have experienced physical pain ourselves. Maybe the intense level of Jesus' physical pain makes it possible for us to better understand the terrible spiritual pain Jesus experienced for us on that cross. If this is the case, maybe there is some justification for the level of violence depicted in Mel Gibson's movie.

But, do we really need such a movie to understand the passion of the Christ? To grasp the meaning of the cross? To present the gospel of Jesus Christ? No, God has chosen another way, a better way to convey this truth.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18)

The “message of the cross” is literally the “word of the cross.” The passion of the Christ, the meaning of the cross is found in God's Word. It pleased God to convey the truth of the cross through the preaching of His Word (1 Cor. 1:21). It is in God's Word that we find the gospel of Jesus Christ: “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the

Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is in God's Word that we find how we can be saved from our sins: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The Word is the power of God unto salvation to all who will simply believe (Rom. 1:16).

What about you? Having heard the Word of the cross, will you believe and be saved? You don't have to see the movie to understand the passion of the Christ. The message is there in God's precious Word. You can simply respond in faith to the Word (Eph. 2:8-9) and experience the joy of salvation; the peace of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

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