

The Other Side of the Passion of Christ

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* has become an international sensation and one of the most successful films ever produced. Even if you have not seen the movie you cannot help but know about it. It is a graphic portrayal of the utter brutality of Roman flogging and crucifixion.

In the movie we see the soldiers beat Jesus with whips that shred his skin and splatter his blood. They begin with his back and move toward his feet. When there seems to be nothing more to brutalize they turn him over and beat the front of his body the way they beat his back. It is horrible to watch and worse to imagine. You cannot understand how a man so beaten and bloody could walk, much less carry a cross. How could he survive long enough to be crucified? Then they nail him to a cross on the ground, pick up the cross and flip it over to bend the nails on the other side of the wood so they won't pull out. The cross is raised and dropped into a socket in the ground. Jesus hangs in excruciating pain until he finally dies.

Christians have told me that they can never be the same after seeing the film. It is life changing to realize what Jesus did for us. Take it personally. It was personal. Romans 5:8 tells us that, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

Isaiah graphically described the physical suffering of Jesus nearly 800 years before Jesus was crucified in Isaiah 52:14, ". . . his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness . . ." Jesus was tortured, abused and disfigured to the point that he no longer looked human. He was virtually unrecognizable. Isaiah goes on to say in 53:2-5:

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*

*Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities . . .*

There is no man on whom I could ever wish or inflict such pain. Like you, I want to look the other way. I want to think about something else. It is too hard to see. It is too painful to witness. And the horror of horrors is that my sin was the cause for what he suffered.

How could any of us not be grateful? How could any of us not be transformed? It is no wonder that those who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion were willing to give up everything to serve him and to spread his gospel. Our problems seem so small by comparison. Our concerns appear so selfish in the shadow of the cross. In the words of the old hymn writer, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

But, I must tell you that the physical pain of Jesus on the cross was the smaller part of his suffering. Without any desire to minimize the horror, I dare to say that his physical horror was nothing in comparison to what he experienced spiritually.

Quite frankly, crucifixions were not uncommon in the first century Roman Empire. There were other men who were equally brutalized. Some were flogged to death. Thousands were crucified—sometimes in mass executions that lined the highways with crosses. Jesus was not unique in the way he died.

But, none other suffered what Jesus suffered. Listen carefully to one of the most stunning and sobering statements in the Bible, from 2 Corinthians 5:21: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" That was the ultimate horror Jesus

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suffered on Calvary's cross.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." That was the true essence of the passion of the Christ.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." That is why the Son of God came to earth.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." That is how we have forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." That is why Jesus repeatedly prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that this "cup" pass from him.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." That is what Jesus had in mind when he said in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, "This is my body, which is for you . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."

Jesus had no sin. That is difficult for us to imagine because we have never known an hour of life without sin. We are sinners born and raised in a world of sin. We are so familiar with sin that we are often quite comfortable in it. We can even joke about sin. We can even enjoy sin.

But not Jesus! Jesus was and is the eternal Son of God. He never sinned. He lived a perfect life. He hated sin. He was personally uninvolved and untainted by sin. To Jesus sin was the ultimate fear factor—more than the worst nightmare; worse than any physical pain.

I try to think of some comparison, but I realize that we cannot begin to know what Jesus went through. Try to imagine if you were accused of murdering the family you loved. You insisted on your innocence but no one believed you. The press vilified you on every front page. Your name became synonymous with the Boston Strangler, Ted Bundy and other mass murderers. Your friends turned against you. The jury deliberated for less than five minutes before convicting you. Even your fellow prisoners were disgusted at the sight of you. The guards spit on you and tortured you. No attorney wanted to appeal your conviction. And . . . you didn't do it. You are innocent. Now, multiply that times

the human population of the world for all of history. That still is not close to capturing what Jesus experienced!

The worst torture of all came on the cross when God the Father was so disgusted with the sin on his Son that he could not look. He turned his back and Jesus felt abandoned to the point that he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is the only time in Jesus' recorded life that he did not call out to God as his Father. (It is not that God forsook him. He did not. It is that God the Father poured out on Jesus all of his wrath toward sin and his full punishment for every sin that humans have ever committed. It

was so spiritually excruciating that Jesus felt abandoned and spoke from his heart in a pathetic cry of desperation.

There is no possible way that we can begin to understand the indescribable horror when the sins of humanity were dumped on Jesus and he suffered the consequences for us all. We cannot understand now. We will not be able to understand in heaven. Angels could not understand it. Jesus experienced it and he alone understands what it was like.

It was a miracle. Jesus took our sin and gave to us his righteousness. He was our only hope. This was the only way.

This is the other side of the passion of the Christ. Jesus did not ask us to understand. He asked us to remember. Remember that, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

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