

Passion pt2

Why Did Jesus Have To Suffer?

As Gibson alluded in his masterful film, the snake had been prophesied to strike the heel of the Messiah, but the Messiah was to crush the head (authority) of the snake. Genesis 3:15 is the oldest prophesy concerning the Messiah and it involved suffering. Isaiah wrote a number of predictions about the suffering servant. We call those passages the Suffering Servant Songs. All throughout the ancient symbols and prophecies we see a picture of the coming Messiah being one who suffers. After Jesus was resurrected he told the two on the road to Emmaus, "26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Luke 24:26 (NIV) Then starting at Moses and going through the prophets He showed them how this was predicted.

But why must the Messiah have suffered? To understand the thought portrayed in Scripture, we must look at the pictures God painted through the history of the Jews. In their sacrificial system, it was prescribed that once a year two goats be brought to the altar. The priest would sacrifice one and sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat. He placed his hands on the other and announce the sins of the people, transferring the sins to the goat. Then the goat was driven out from the camp into the wilderness.

In this picture we see that sin had to be punished. A just God demands that evil be dealt with. We cannot choose to do wrong and go unpunished. We cannot have evil within us and expect to be welcomed into His presence. In the picture, God showed that another could take our sins for us, but that meant death. God promised that sin would result in death. Ezekiel 18:4,20; Romans 6:23

It is the justice of God that demands suffering for sin. Imagine a judge who calls you in for speeding. You tell him you are guilty but that you are as broke as can be and can't afford to pay the fine. The judge can't just let you go, but neither does he desire to send you to jail. He makes a just sentence with a hefty fine, but then he hands you the money to pay for it out of his own pocket.

In a very real way, that is what God did for you through Christ. Your penalty was way more than you could ever pay. In concern and love for you, He paid your debt Himself. There are at least a dozen picture of this same idea throughout the Old Testament. Jesus suffered for our sins in our place so that we could be right with God.

How much suffering does the sin of the world justly deserve? Isaiah predicted that "...there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human

likeness— Isaiah 52:14 (NIV) We don't know what Christ endured during the three hours of darkness, but we do know it was complete justice for our sins. With one of his last breaths he yelled, "It is finished!" The Greek expression was stamped on invoices. The English equivalent is "Paid in Full!" Our sin debt was paid in full by the only One that had no debt of His own.

Why Should We Look at the Suffering?

After seeing *The Passion of the Christ*, many complained about the blood and violence. Wasn't it overdone? The third century historian, Eusebius described a flogging by saying, "The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure." Gibson spared us those graphics. You might ask if the blood was gratuitous. A world renowned expert on crucifixion, Dr. A. Metherell M.D. Ph.D. states, "We know that many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into hypovolemic shock...*Hypo* means 'low' *vol* refers to volume and *emic* means 'blood,' so *hypovolemic shock* means the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood." *The Case for Easter* pg 16

But wasn't the beating prolonged? Dr. Metherell also states, "Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying the blows." We don't have a count of the number of lashings, but we do have two separate words in the accounts in Greek that describe wounds inflicted by a cane and others by a whip. Gibson's account may be the most accurate yet depicted. Of course, no one knows for sure. However, most experts agree that it is very close to what we know of Roman scourging.

What possible good could come from looking at that brutality? Let me answer that with a hypothetical question. If you were in an accident in which you became unconscious, and flames threatened to consume you, and someone entered into those flames causing great injury and pain to themselves to rescue you. When you came to, would you want to know what they endured on your behalf? Would you shy away from the details? Why? What does it do to you to know of their suffering for you?

"The Passion" means the suffering. Mel Gibson made a movie because he wanted us to see what Jesus endured for you. Of course we cannot see the full extent of it, nor can we understand the horror of the three hours of darkness, but forcing ourselves to look should break our heart with love for what He endured for us.

What Was the Relationship Between Pilate and the Sanhedrin?

Since the Passion of the Christ, a number of critics have repeated a Newsweek' article by author Meacham in his condemnation of the portrayal of Pontius Pilate. It is very true that he was a brutal character. Interestingly enough, critics of the Bible claimed he did not exist. They could not find any record of him and so believed that Christian authors made him up. A stone in Caesarea was uncovered that declared the coliseum there was dedicated to him. There are accounts of two uprisings that he brutally squelched with great loss of life. In spite of Rome's heavy-handed tactics, the governors of provinces were required to be civil. The Caesars did not want rebellion as the cost to put it down was often too high. They had fiscal political repercussions just as we do today.

Since Pilate had two strikes against his rule, he had to be very careful about these uprisings. He was walking a tightrope between keeping people content but collecting taxes for Rome. He appointed the high priest to office and held their vestments in the Fortress of Antonia. They worked together and yet were enemies vying for power.

Shortly before the time of Jesus' trial, Pilate's sponsor in Rome, Sejanus, had been executed for treason. Pilate's power was hanging by a thread. Rome just needed the slightest excuse to have him removed from power. That is why their threat carried so much weight. "If you let Him go, you are no friend of Caesar."

Another often overlooked factor is Annas. He was Caiaphas father-in-law. This rascal must have originated and organized the selling of sacrificial animals and the necessary coin exchange in the outer courtyard. It was commonly referred to as Annas' bazaar. This was a huge revenue producing machine. Who got their cut from it? We know from the excavation of the area that the priests homes were opulent. There is more than sufficient motive to depict Caiaphas as someone demanding the death of Jesus. Jesus insisted that the outer court was meant to be a place of prayer for all nations. Twice turning over the tables and driving them out put Him on a collision course with Annas and Caiaphas.

Why does the Bible show Pilate trying to get Jesus set free? Pilate's rivalry for power with the Sanhedrin, and Rome's thirst for more revenue, put Pilate and the Sanhedrin at odds. Jesus was a thorn in the Sanhedrin's side. Pilate would have loved to see Jesus remain a problem and destabilizing force for the Sanhedrin. He doesn't want a revolt, but He doesn't want the Sanhedrin to continue to grow in financial and influential power. Pilate didn't want to free Jesus because Pilate was a nice guy, but because Pilate had an agenda.

There may have also been a fear factor. Pilate's wife warned him that she had a troubling dream about Jesus. Roman mythology has the gods visiting humanity as men. Could Pilate have thought Jesus to be such a visitation? Surely he had heard of the miracles and reputation of Jesus.

When critics of the Passion of the Christ argue about Pilate not being historical and Caiaphas being too rabid, they are ignoring Biblical accounts and secular history because they don't like the Biblical story. They would love to rewrite history with Jesus as a nice misunderstood teacher, "No bad guys are involved. It is all just a misunderstanding. Through it all, Jesus, the nice man, shows us how to love our enemies." Nice try. I say to them what Jesus said of the Jews and Romans, "Father forgive them. They know not what they do." The attempt is to nullify the need for a Savior by denying Jesus' claim to be the ransom for mankind. Then there is no need to acknowledge sin in our lives or live for the One who died for us. There is a self-serving motivation for denying the truth of the New Testament account. There is no such motivation in hearing Jesus' call to deny your self and follow Him.