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'The Passion of Christ'

...not How, but Why

Controversy rages about the relative merits and demerits of Mel Gibson's film *Passion of Christ*.

What is the real message?

by James McBride

Lauded by many Roman and Protestant Christians worldwide the film is viewed by others as an affront to Jewish sensitivities - and indeed perceived by some viewers as rather tasteless in its lurid depiction of gratuitous violence.

The 'How'

Jesus did indeed suffer. He was maliciously opposed throughout his years of ministry by the religious hierarchy. In one night he was betrayed by a close friend, abandoned by his disciples, tried by a prejudiced Court and handed over to the occupying power in the 'hope' they would execute him. He was exposed to the taunts of an inflamed baying rabble.

Jesus was humiliated and mocked by Rome's foot-soldiers, and scourged by its torturers. He was impaled on a wooden stake and left to die - again taunted by the few who were close enough to see his suffering. His pain was, finally, ended by a Roman spear thrust to his side.

All this is fact - and depicted in varying degree of accuracy and omission in the film.

More Fact

However, it is also fact that much of his torment was in private, witnessed by relatively few. A crowd, later, witnessed his procession through the quiet early morning streets of Jerusalem. Most, however, were preoccupied with preparations for the Passover that coming evening. It was the Sanhedrin who, summoned to Pilate, screeched for his death. Few gathered within close sight of the 'cross' to witness his agony first-hand.

And in the centuries since not a one witnessed his final hours in person. Yet the suffering and death of Jesus - and his glorious resurrection - has impacted millions. The

world became a better place. Many - despite never having witnessed the crucifixion - have been brought to faith and to eternal life. The message of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth reverberates down the centuries.

The Right Question

Clearly the 'how' of the suffering of Jesus is off the scale in its significance. His horrendous ordeal - foreseen in detail by prophets and psalmists - wrings the hearts of even unbelievers. More significant, however, is its meaning. *Why* did Jesus die?

The world of the first century wallowed in darkness and depravity. In pursuance of His divine plan God stepped into our world - in the person of His Son.

Unnatural Death

God is perfect. He is 'pure light'. Man (Adam) was created complete at a specific time on a specific day. He was the perfect image and likeness in human form of his Creator and, reflecting that light, had the potential to live for ever.

Exercising his freedom of choice, Adam 'switched off the light'. In Bible terms, *he sinned* and became subject to death. Contrary to common belief, death is *not* 'natural' for man. Certainly we all die - but that is the consequence of sin. God's plan was that we live for ever. As long as Adam functioned in accordance with God's 'Instruction Manual' - His eternal spiritual Law - he would remain alive in his flesh. He ate the forbidden fruit - and the death process began. "*Whoever obeys the whole Law, but slips in one point, becomes guilty in every respect*" (James 2:10). It doesn't matter which part of a shattered vase hits the ground first!

Why Jesus Died

As the head - and representative - of the human race, Adam

The Passion of Christ

passed on death to all of us: ‘...in Adam all die’ (I Corinthians 15:22). His sin was a barrier that separated him - and us - from the God of all holiness.

So precious to the Creator is each human life that He said: “Whoever sheds a person’s blood by man shall his blood be shed, because God made man in His likeness” (Genesis 9:6). And “...the blood through the life in it serves for expiation” (Leviticus 17:11). Adam’s life was sustained by his circulating blood: “The life is in the blood”. This vital renewable organ was his life. The shedding of blood - in sacrifices, in judicial execution - is symbolic of death.

And we are all - all mankind - subject to that penalty and deserving of death ‘for that all have sinned’. God, as Creator, so loved His creation that He had to define a means whereby man’s depravity could be reconciled to His - God’s - perfect and awesome holiness, and to satisfy justice.

Only the death of a man, a new Adam - born of sinful woman, subject to God’s Law and who throughout his life successfully resisted every sinful thought - only such a death could break the pattern and reconcile God and man. God decreed Jesus was that man.

The ire of the religious hierarchy - the Sanhedrin - having been stirred they sought his death knowing full well the vile implications of a Roman crucifixion. In the end Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed and his blood poured out when he was pierced by a Roman lance - at the time designated for the annual Passover sacrifices in the Temple. Only by means of his pain and his blood poured out on that hillside is it possible for us to be reconciled to the all-holy God. Not to satisfy some mythical bloodthirsty tyrannical God but as the first step towards becoming part of a loving Father’s ever-living Family.

That’s why Jesus died - for each of us.

[Request the article: *Passover - A Double Celebration*]

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