

The Passion of the Christ # 2: “Why did Jesus Choose to Die?”

Jesus Loves Me This I Know

The Bible tells us that Jesus loves us. That is why Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is so powerful! This movie tries to be a faithful rendering of the Scriptures that tell of Jesus' death. The Bible tells me that Jesus loves me so much so that Jesus is willing to die for me. Getting a small glimpse of the agony by watching the movie helped me appreciate God's love for me all the more.

Why did Jesus die? Jesus loves me!

Seeing *The Passion of the Christ* was hard. It left me in appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice, but also left me with some questions. My first question that came to me is: Why did Jesus have to go through that? If God wants to forgive us, why doesn't he just do it?

Then, another thought hit me: for some reason, Jesus went through all of this willingly! He was God in the flesh, meaning that He could have called upon angels to carry Him away, or He Himself could have just whispered destruction upon those who were hurting Him and it would have happened. Come on! He was God! He must have chose to go through all that mess!

So the better question is: why did Jesus choose to die?

I want to look today at why Jesus chose to die.

First, Jesus died to show us the ugliness of sin.

Have you ever had a song or a piece of poetry that makes a point more so than a straight forward fact? The fact is: the light from stars seem to twinkle because of atmospheric gases. I have seen a girl, however, melt when you tell her that her father must have been a thief, because someone stole the twinkle from the stars and put them in her eyes. There is something about poetry.

When the Apostle Paul wanted to make a point about something important, like: our sin, he just didn't come out and use facts. He used a form of Greek poetry that spelled out that everyone sins and are in need of a Savior. He strung together Old Testament Passage after Old Testament Passage so that people's hearts will be pricked in the same way a song will open someone's eyes. It might not seem like poetry to you, but this is what he does in Romans 3. **Turn with me to Romans 3:10-18.** After we read this, be sure to hold on to that spot, because we are going to come back to Romans. READ

No one today, likes to talk about the idea of sin.

Have you ever noticed that no one actually "sins" today? People constantly make excuses for their sin. They say things like:

- i. It is everyone else's fault. Society made me this way.
- ii. It is the situation that they are in that makes them do it. If I wasn't poor, I wouldn't have to steal.
- iii. Their genes make them do it. It is in their DNA. They were genetically predisposed to be an alcoholic or gay.

Some even go so far as to make excuses for other people's sin. I have heard on the news people tell us that we should "understand" Terrorists, rather than call what they do sin!

The fact is, however, sin impacts everyone. Everyone sins. None of us are without fault.

Why did Jesus die?...

Even though we are sinful, Jesus still loves us! Jesus died to show us the evilness, the ugliness, the repulsiveness, the viciousness of sin. The cross reveals what sin really looks like to God.

Sin is betrayal and Betrayal is deeply physical. It is something you feel. Some of you know that I am talking about. You have been betrayed by a spouse, or a parent, or a friend and it has hurt physically. Some of you have been cheated on, and it has brought you to your knees.

Brian McClaren put it this way: “When you find out that you have been fooled, taken for granted, taken advantage of, you feel cheap, violated in your whole body. Your whole world goes empty, and your stomach burns, and your legs feel numb, and your neck feels cold, and your lungs feel like you’re breathing some poisonous gas, and your brain is like one big fire alarm buzzing so loud you can hardly stand it. Betrayal is something you feel in your whole body.”

The cross is all about God’s agony being made visible – the pain of forgiving, the pain of absorbing the betrayal, the pain of forgoing revenge, and the pain of risking that your heart will be hurt again. Your beloved, who has been the least worthy of forgiveness, stands most in need of it. It is not just legal or mental. Nails and thorns and sweat and tears and blood is the only true language of betrayal and forgiveness.

Jesus died to show us the ugliness of sin.

Why did Jesus die?...

First, Jesus died to show us the ugliness of sin.

Second, Jesus died so we’d have power to love each other.

Jesus died so we’d have power to love each other.

When Jesus died, He showed us who our real enemy is. He showed us that God is not after us. God is not our enemy. He shows us that there is a battle raging and we can’t win it without Him. He showed us that we must face our enemies head on and then, and only then, will we be able to love someone else. Let’s look at our enemies:

Enemy # 1: our flesh. In each of us is a battle that rages. READ Romans 7:21-25

For some reason, we want to sin. When you become a Christian, the urge to sin doesn’t go away! This puts us at odds with God. In our inner most being, we want to do what He doesn’t. We need

forgiveness. For forgiveness to be legitimate and real, an expression of sincere repentance from the wrongdoer is required. Yet none of us can repent sincerely or fully, because deep down, a part of us, still loves to sin. Our best repentance is always ambivalent, partial, holding back.

This is when Jesus steps in to help us deal with this enemy. Jesus' acceptance of death is His enacting, on behalf of the entire human race, perfect repentance for us. He becomes the representative for all of humanity and willingly submits himself to being condemned and punished on our account, in spite of His true innocence. He defeats the enemy within: our flesh by being our representative. This means we can love! We can love God, and love others because Jesus takes over in our battle by dying on the cross.

Why did Jesus die?...

Enemy # 2 is similar to # 1: our own selfishness. Jesus' death completes the whole message of His life: He makes visible the self-giving love of God. When you look at the cross, you can't help but see how Jesus is selfless rather than selfish.

The cross makes us want to give our entire being to God as well. We want to join Jesus in self-giving, in humbleness, in charity. We do this first by giving ourselves back to God, and then to our neighbors and the world. Jesus invites us into His self-giving and by doing so defeats our own selfishness.

Why did Jesus die?...

Enemy # 3 stems from # 1 & # 2. Our third enemy is coercion, violence, oppression, and dominance. By becoming vulnerable on the cross, by accepting suffering from everyone, rather than visiting suffering on everyone, Jesus is showing God's loving heart, which wants forgiveness, not revenge. The cross calls humanity to stop trying to make God's kingdom happen through coercion and force, and instead to welcome it through self-sacrifice and vulnerability.

Jesus' self-sacrifice is so different from the world's answers. When you are in despair, He gives you the answer you need. The world gives you what they need!

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out . . .

~ A subjective person came along and said, "I feel for you down there."

~ An objective person walked by and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there."

~ A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into pits."

~ A mathematician calculated how deep the pit was.

~ A news reporter wanted the exclusive story on the pit.

~ An IRS agent asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

~ A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit."

~ A fire-and-brimstone preacher said, "You deserve your pit."

~ A Christian Scientist observed, "The pit is just in your mind."

~ A psychologist noted, "Your mother and father are to blame for your being in that pit."

~ A self-esteem therapist said, "Believe in yourself and you can get out of that pit."

~ An optimist said, "Things could be worse."

~ A pessimist claimed, "Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit

At the cross, Jesus defeats our enemies that lie within us, and shows a better way: love others. Jesus died so that we'd love others. Jesus died to get us out of the pit we are in! Jesus died so that we'd have power to defeat our flesh, our selfishness, and our violent nature. Jesus died so that when these are defeated, we can truly love!

Why did Jesus die?...

- **Jesus died to show us the ugliness of sin.**
- **Jesus died so we'd have power to love each other.**

Jesus died to show us the way to God

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonized, "Father if there is any other way let this cup pass from me." He asked God that if there was any other way, please let it happen. What was God's answer? He allowed the cross to happen, because there was no other way for people to be saved.

If people can live a good life or follow another religion, Jesus would never have had to die. But there was no other way.

Read with me Romans 3:20-25

There are three terms I want you to hear from this passage, and the first has to do with the law:

- Justice = penalties deserve punishment. If God is just, then when His laws are broken, there must be punishment. Imagine for a minute if there was no justice in America...
- Mercy = forgiveness when you deserve punishment.
- Grace = favor when you deserve punishment.

God is full of all three. His justice demands that our sin be paid for in full. His grace and mercy through the blood of Christ provides a way for our sins to be paid for. In fact, Romans 5:20 tells us: *Where sin increases, grace increases all the more.* Jesus' actions of goodness and selfishness nullifies evil and selfishness.

Even the disciple who spoke to Jesus while He was on the cross tells us that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for our sins. John cherished Jesus deeply and yet saw the cross up close. He believed that Jesus' death was necessary to bridge the gap between the Father and us. 1 John 2:2 – *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* If someone who saw it with His own eyes says this, shouldn't we take notice of what Jesus provides in His death? We can't sit back and let people talk about how Jesus didn't need to die for our sins.

The idea of grace and mercy flies in the face of people who say that Jesus didn't have to die for our sins. Some say that He was merely a model for us. If this is true, I ask: why not follow Gandhi as he died? Martin Luther King, Jr. as he was assassinated? Or Pat Tillman as he made his sacrifice in combat? Jesus was much more than a model for us in His death. He was our way to God.

It is good to focus on the life of Christ, but we have to keep in mind that His life's focus was the cross. The Apostle Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says nothing of Christ's sinless life, but includes: *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*

Let's face it: if Jesus didn't die, then He couldn't be raised from the dead. "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:18) Jesus died for you and for me! Why did Jesus die?...

- **Jesus died to show us the ugliness of sin.**
- **Jesus died so we'd have power to love each other.**
- **Jesus died to show us the way to God**

I am the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me. If He has shown you the way, are you on the right path? **Call for a decision** - Song: *The Old Rugged Cross*