

The Passion of the Christ # 3 – Why did people treat him so poorly?

You have to be living in a hole to avoid all the attention that's been given to Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. It is now out on DVD and VHS, and is still making headlines. When it first came out, it was in every newspaper, on the cover of *Newsweek* and *Time*, and talked about in television shows. Very few movies have gotten this much attention. When Mel Gibson talks about *The Passion of the Christ*, he is using an old English word, "passion", which literally means "suffering". This is not passion as in sexual or sensual passion, but the word means suffering.

Specifically, technically, *The Passion of the Christ* refers to the last twelve hours of Jesus' life. There was a lot of pain, suffering, passion in those last twelve hours!

The pain, suffering, passion, was on a lot of levels. There was the physical agony of nails, thorns, and exhaustion. There was the spiritual agony of being separated from God the Father. But there was another agony that was just as deep: the agony of abandonment. All of Jesus' friends, disciples, and family deserted Him! The Jewish people, who should have loved Him, rejected Him. The very people, who He came to save, crucified Him!

Today, I want to look at three separate people groups that are found in the Gospels. I wan to see why these people deserted and rejected Jesus. I want to answer the question: **Why did people treat Jesus so poorly?**

Let' first look at: **THE DISCIPLES**

Nobody likes to be betrayed or hurt—especially when the rejection comes from someone to whom we've felt very close.

We have all had, seen, or been fair weather friends and tended to disappear when a friend was going through a tough time. But the abandonment of Jesus by His closest friends seems bizarre, weird. After all, these guys believed in Jesus so much that they left everything to tag along with Him. Then they were hand picked out of hundreds of prospects to be part of Jesus' inner circle.

The disciples had seen incredible miracles. Why would such friends leave such a man after all this? It seems incredible, until we examine our own hearts and histories, and remember that they were no different than we are. Why did His disciples desert him?

Turn with me to Matthew 26:36-41

A. The Disciples deserted Jesus because they were Fatigued, too tired to deal with what needed to be done.

1. When Jesus requested His disciples' prayers they wanted to comply, but they were too tired.
2. We probably can relate to these disciples more than we want to admit: some of us are too busy. Busyness is what is destroying some of our relationships with God – we are not taking the time to pray, taking the time to see what God is saying in our Word, taking the time to serve in our church. We need to be aware that busyness can lead to us deserting God's plan for our lives.
3. Some of us are too tired to seriously deal with the problems and sin in our lives. We don't want to have to deal with our depression, anger, pain, lust, bitterness, jealousy, or confusion and we sweep it under the rug.

In his book *Fuzzy Memories*, Jack Handey writes: "There used to be this bully who would demand my lunch money every day. Since I was smaller, I would give it to him. But then I decided to fight back. I started taking karate lessons. But then the karate lesson guy said I had to start paying him five dollars a lesson. So I just went back to paying the bully."

Isn't that most like us? Too many of us feel it is easier to pay the bully than it is to learn how to defeat him. That's the way many of us are with sin. Sin violates our relationship with God. It is disobedience against a gracious and loving God. The primary reason we want sin removed from our lives is to restore our relationship with God. But, we don't have the strength because of our fatigue to accomplish such a monumental task. Our strength must come from Christ. *Philippians 4:13 - For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.*

B. The Disciples deserted Jesus because they were also afraid.

1. When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, His disciples fled in fear. READ Matthew 26:55-56
2. The Disciples were afraid and deserted Jesus because they did not understand that the arrest was part of God's plan.
3. Sometimes we claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, but when God doesn't act like we want Him to, we too desert His plan.
 1. We don't tell our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family about God's plan of salvation. We are afraid we'd lose the relationship.
 2. We don't say NO to temptation at a party, because we are afraid of our friends response.
 3. We get involved in the Church, because we are afraid it will take up too much of our time.

We have to be reminded though, of where Fatigue and Fear lead. Fatigue and Fear led Judas Iscariot to hang himself, and Simon Peter to deny Jesus three times. If

fatigue and fear led the disciples to reject God's plan for their lives, we'd better be careful as well! Who are we to say that we are better than the Apostles! The Disciples left everything to follow Jesus, spent three years of their lives with Him up close, and started the Church. Fatigue and fear can lead us into dangerous territory as well.

The Disciples were filled with Fatigue and Fear, but there is another people group that treated Jesus poorly as well: His own, the Jewish people.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Ask anyone who has moved to Cerro Gordo recently, and they will tell you that it is hard to fit in. If you don't have family here, then the town's people treat you like an outsider at times. In fact, most people will ask you what your last name is, so that they will be able to determine what side of the tracks you live on. But when you are second generation born and raised in Cerro Gordo you are one of the insiders. Jesus was an insider to the Jewish people. It would take a lot for them to just abandon Him.

Those who don't know the story stumble out of the theatre thinking, "Why are the Jewish people doing such horrible things to this nice Man? Why such hostility? Why did they arrest Him in the garden when all He was doing was praying? Why the mock trials-back and forth? Why the scourging, and beating? Why did they kill this Man who had no previous criminal record for what must have been a first offense?"

Why did the Jewish people reject him? After all, even those who reject Christianity and doubt that He was God in the flesh are quick to say, "He was a good man." Or they'll say, "Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet known for keeping the peace, extending grace, and showing love."

But while those statements are true, they come up far short of who Jesus is and they begin to explain why so many of his people rejected Him.

- I. **The people couldn't accept Jesus' claims to be God.**
 - A. Read with me Matthew 26:57-68
 - B. Christ's claim that he was God was a bold statement.
 1. The high priest was correct in saying he was blaspheming IF He wasn't the Messiah.
 2. But if Jesus was the Messiah, then it wasn't blasphemy –it was the TRUTH.
 - C. All through out Jesus' ministry, He made claims about Him being God:
 1. John 5:17-18 - *Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

2. John 8:58 – *Jesus answered, “The truth is, I existed before Abraham was even born!”*
3. John 14:11 – *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*

II. **Jesus also didn’t fit the Jewish people’s concept of a Messiah.**

- A. The people thought that the Messiah’s kingdom would be political. John 18:36 - *Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*
- B. Traditions were important to the Jewish people. Jesus said in Mark 2:27: *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* In other words, your traditions, even those in the Ten Commandments, are useless if your heart is not right with God.
- C. Jesus time and time again associated with the wrong people: tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners.
- D. Jesus even called their leaders, the religious leaders, the Pharisees, a bunch of hypocrites, white washed tombs, and a brood of snakes in Matthew 23.

III. **The people couldn’t come to grips with Jesus’ demand for life change**

- A. Jesus forgave an adulterous woman, but told her to leave her life of sin (John 8:9-11).
- B. Jesus told a wealthy man to sell everything he had and give it to the poor (Mark 10:17-22).
- C. Jesus told the crowds to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34).

Some today, struggle with the same things the Jewish people did with Jesus. They can’t get over that Jesus was God in the flesh, or Jesus doesn’t fit into their box of who they think He should be. Some can’t deal with Jesus’ demands for our lives. Yet, God is calling you today to do the same: Mark 8:34 – *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*

The Disciples deserted Jesus because of Fear and Fatigue. The Jewish people treated Jesus poorly because He did not fit their mold of what a Messiah should be. There is one more group of people that I want to look at today.

THE ROMAN SOLDIERS

The movie, “The Passion of Christ,” has been widely criticized for its graphic violence. It’s unusual to hear Hollywood so strongly protesting violence in the movies. “The Matrix” never drew this kind of attention; “Rambo,” “Die Hard,” and “The Terminator” all seemed acceptable by Hollywood’s standards of appropriate violence. No one complained much about “Saving Private Ryan”...and movies like “Gladiator” and “Braveheart” won their share of awards. The hypocrisy of their criticism seems to be

enough to cancel it out. But if you've seen the movie or even just the previews, you found yourself asking, "Why does it have to be so bloody?" "Why do they have to beat Jesus so violently?" Well, because it was, and because they did.

In fact, what actually happened to Jesus was even worse than the movie portrayed. Taking so much time to picture the suffering that Jesus went through is accurate with the Gospels. The Gospels devote nearly a third of their length to the final week of Jesus, and the suffering of Jesus is given significantly more attention than His birth.

We need a reason for this pain – surely there is a reason – something that makes sense out of images that are so disturbing. What makes it even more difficult to understand is that none of it is forced. No one was doing this to Jesus against His will; at any second He could put a stop to it. The Jews didn't kill Jesus, the Romans weren't responsible - Jesus suffered willingly.

Why doesn't God put a stop to this? Nothing compares to the self-restraint that God shows as His one and only Son is beaten and spat upon. Jesus himself in Matthew 26 makes it clear that if he wanted to he could command 12 legions of angels, that's 72 thousand, to come to his defense. And with every crack of the whip, with every cry of agony, with every drop of blood that falls to the ground the angels of heaven grow more restless. With tense muscles they watch the Son of God tortured and humiliated...just the say the word...and this thing will be over. But Jesus endures the beating and the humiliation.

Knowing that Jesus did this willingly, doesn't answer a question for me though: How could the Roman soldiers torture him like that? Read Matthew 27:27-31 & 35 in the Message version.

When I search for the answers, I don't like where it leads. I discovered that in the account of the Passion of Christ we are more like the Roman Soldiers than we would ever want to admit.

Listen to some of the things the Romans soldiers were filled with:

- I. **IGNORANCE** – They didn't know what they were doing
 - A. Luke 23:34 - *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*
 - B. Ignorance is a favorite defense of ours. The Romans didn't know that they were torturing the one who knit them together in their mother's womb.
 1. Out of ignorance we do a lot of things we regret. After they are done, we look back and see that we shouldn't have. While ignorance might be an explanation, ignorance is not an excuse.
 2. There may be some one here who has shut Christ out of your life because of ignorance. Maybe you've focused on the Christians

who are hypocrites. Maybe you've never been taught that God is a God of love, not hate. Maybe you didn't know that your sin sent Jesus to the cross. Maybe you didn't realize that His blood was spilt for your lying, your greed, your pride, your lust. Maybe you didn't know that Christ sets you free. Following Christ and going to Church is about freedom, not more rules.

3. If you didn't know, today, God can open your eyes!

The Roman soldiers were also filled with:

- II. **PREJUDICE** – They were turned off by God's people.
 - A. The Romans and the Jews hated each other.
 - 1. The Romans hated being stationed in Palestine.
 - 2. The Jews were a proud, independent people who didn't like being under the Roman oppression.
 - 3. Chances are, because of their prejudices towards the Jews, they relished the opportunity to torture and crucify a Jewish Carpenter.
 - B. Maybe some of you or someone you know is not moved by Jesus because of your prejudice against God's people today.
 - 1. Maybe the church has left such a bad taste in your mouth that you won't taste and see that the Lord is good.
 - 2. Maybe you've shut Jesus out of your life because a Christian has a bad example.
 - 3. Maybe you just think Christians are weird.
 - 4. I challenge you today to see beyond hypocritical, imperfect Christians and look to Christ.

The Romans were filled with ignorance, prejudice, and...

- III. **NUMBNESS** – They had seen all this before.
 - A. Flogging Jesus and humiliating Him was something the soldiers seemed to enjoy.
 - 1. These soldiers had probably performed so many scourgings, it was methodical for them.
 - 2. In the movie, you get the impression they weren't just casual about what they were doing to Jesus; they were having fun with it.
 - 3. The Roman Soldiers were so numb to what was happening to Jesus that they were playing games, gambling at the foot of the cross.
 - B. It's possible for those of us who attend church regularly to become so familiar with the suffering that we're no longer moved by it.
 - 1. Maybe you were brought up in the church all your life, and every week you've heard about the blood of Jesus. But now it's familiar. It doesn't move you the way it once did. You're immune to it.

Jesus is calling each of us to open our eyes to our ignorance. Jesus is calling each of us to be turned on instead of turned off because of prejudice. Jesus is calling each of us to see that our hearts may be numb!

Jesus is arrested and he stands before Pilate and is badgered over and over again, when Jesus won't answer him Pilate gets up in his face and says (John 19:10) "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said, "Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

What in essence was Jesus saying, was this, "Make no mistake, Pilate, you are not taking my life. I am giving it."

You have a choice to make. Many of his people rejected him, but it's not about what THEY did with Him. What are you going to do with Christ? He still claims to be God and wants to have authority in your life. He may not fit the mold of what you think you need and yet He promises to provide everything you need in this life and the life to come. He asks you to be willing to change, but He promises to help you change if you'll just give Him control of your life.

Like the Disciples, are you filled with fear? Are you too tired to keep going?

Like the Jewish people, will you reject Jesus as the Messiah, because He doesn't fit your picture of what God should be?

Like the Romans, is your heart numb because of ignorance and prejudice?

God is calling you today to realize that it is easy to be like the people in the Gospel story, because that means no change would occur. We might think, no that's not me, but in reality when we really look at how the people treated Jesus so poorly, we realize that we are sometimes just as guilty.

God promises a new heart if you put your faith in what Jesus did on the cross. The movie may have moved you, but to do what? My hope is that it is to put your faith in Christ. Ezekiel 36:26 says: *I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart.*

If you are searching for a new heart, I ask you, are you willing to put your faith in Christ? God wants you to:

1. Believe - Believe in the message of the Cross – Jesus loves you enough to die for you and to pay for your sins. Believe in the resurrection, that Jesus actually rose from the dead.
2. Confess – make a statement daily that Christ is Lord of your life.

3. Repent – Make a U-turn in your life. Turn away from selfish living and turn to God's way of living.
4. Be baptized – take on Christ in the waters and make a pledge of a good conscience to God that you put your trust in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.
5. Keep living for Him – don't let your heart get moldy with fatigue, fear, rejection, doubts, ignorance, prejudice, numbness. God wants to give you a new heart!

If you will make a decision today for Him, God promises this new heart. As we sing this next song, Jesus wants to make your heart as white as snow. Will you let Him?

As the song leader comes up here and gets ready, I want to pray with you, so that when we sing, you are asking God for this clean heart.

If you have a decision today, come down this while we sing.