

## The Passion of the Christ

When I first heard that Mel Gibson was producing a movie about the last twelve hours in the life of Jesus Christ, I feared that we would see Hollywood produce another skewed version of the Biblical message. Having seen Gibson in *The Patriot*, a good movie in spite of its graphic violence, I was concerned that Christ's harrowing ordeal would be turned into a gratuitous spectacle in the eyes of a society never sated in its appetite for virtual violence. I was completely wrong. Yes, it contained a great amount of violence, but it was anything but superfluous or shallow. My daughter aptly described it as "*the most terrible and the most beautiful thing*" she had ever seen.

Whenever I see that Hollywood is delving into religious issues, particularly Christian religious issues, or the news media discussing elements of Christian life, history, and faith, I cringe. But, Mel Gibson and all those who collaborated with him to produce this monumental work have separated themselves from the secular field. What was produced was a biblically accurate, deeply moving, profoundly articulate cinematic production of the pivotal event in God's work with His creation. From the opening scene in the Garden of Gethsemane to the vignette of the resurrection in the final scene, from the personification of Satan to the depiction in the Garden of the prophecy found in Genesis 3: 15, from the outstanding characterizations of Mary, Peter, Pontius Pilate, and Mary Magdalene to the portrayal of our suffering Lord, Gibson produced a cinematic triumph, a masterpiece of art, and a powerful proclamation of Jesus Christ. He not only maintained the literal sense, but where he had to fill in the blanks or exercise poetic license, captured the spiritual implication with a depth of perception rarely attained even among the most serious and reflective of Christians. The result is not a movie but an experience. There are no films of the past to which *The Passion of the Christ* can be compared. It has created a category of its own and will in all likelihood stand alone in it for a very long time to come.

A great testimony to the movie's accomplishment is the huge number of people who are flocking to it and the universal phenomenon that all leave it in eerie silence. Of course, all the credit for that cannot not go to Gibson alone. While he was able to portray the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ in a way that has probably brought a greater realism to God's sacrificial love than anything since the actual event, the ultimate credit goes to Jesus. Gibson has enabled the believer and unbeliever alike to see the magnitude of the suffering endured by the Son of God for the sins of mankind in a way we have never been able before. This concept of a suffering Savior has been embraced by all Christians, but adequately understood by few. I strongly suspect that most, like myself, tend to envision a serene Savior dying quietly on the cross rather than a tortured Savior who, out of the strength of pure, matchless love, willed Himself to submit to abuse, ridicule, and torment. As one watches the scenes unfold, the heart must surely be softened by witnessing the ghastly brutality inflicted against one innocent of any crime. As I took myself back two thousand years and placed myself in the event, I wanted to say to God, "*Let it stop. Destroy your enemies if you must, but let it stop.*" Then

I remembered that I am the enemy. And if it were to stop, I would have no hope. But, again, could any of us say while watching such a scene, *"Yes, let it go on. Keep on taking the beating for me, Jesus, because I am worth it"*? I still had to say in my heart, "Let it stop. I am not worth it." That sentiment is, I believe, why so many people are exiting the theaters in silence. Consciously or not, we are all recognizing in some way, some maybe for the first time and others more deeply than ever before, how unworthy we are of God's grace. We did not comprehend the terrible price at which our salvation was purchased.

It is amazing that such a powerful film would come when the wave of secularism is reaching a record crest. It is ironic that at the same moment when anti-Christian sentiment is becoming more vocal, when homosexuals are pushing their agenda with utter disregard for Divine principles, when our courts have almost entirely ruled God out of the public sector, and when our nation is languishing in an expanding vortex of immorality, that a film with a message of Jesus Christ enters into the American scene with tremendous power. Instantly the barriers to Christian discourse have evaporated. Now men and women of faith must capitalize on the example of a bold believer. We must not let the emotions aroused by the movie diffuse quickly into forgotten sentiment. While the Passion of Christ is the pivotal event of all time, there is much more to the story of God and Jesus Christ that needs to be told.

We are concerned with what each of us will do with what we saw. Do we understand what God's purpose was in the Creation? Do we grasp the point of the tremendous suffering and sacrifice of the Son of God? Do we recognize that we are supposed to respond to God's great love manifested in this great and noble act? Where do we fit in God's eternal plan? Did God sacrifice His Beautiful Son for our sins that we may continue in them?

We will be here every other week to explore these questions and many others. Please look for us. We also invite you to visit our website, mail us your questions or observations, send us an [e-mail](#), give us a call, or visit us in person at the times listed for worship and study. May God bless us all.