

Should we watch Gibson's "The Passion of Christ"?

Much of the controversy surrounding the movie centers on a historical issue. The Jewish community in USA accuses Gibson of wrongly depicting the Jews as solely responsible for Jesus' death. The charge against Gibson is that he is anti-Semitic.

My critic centers on other issues. But let me first make a comment about the above charge. Historically, of course, it was the Jews who demanded that Christ should be punished as a blasphemer. Christ first preached the gospel to them. But they took offense at his preaching. The Bible says in Acts 2:22: "Men of Israel, hear these words:...Him being delivered by the purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death." This text from the Bible states that Christ's death is according to the purpose of God. God's purpose in giving Christ to the world is so that our Saviour may take upon himself the sins of the whole world. He went to the cross carrying the sin and guilt of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Christ was punished for the sins of many. Though the Jews were historically guilty of physically crucifying Christ on the cross, Christ really was punished for the whole of sinful mankind. For this reason, in Christ's resurrection, he brought life to many. Both Jews and non-Jews are saved through his atoning death.

Now that I have put this right (I hope), let me say why we should not watch Gibson's Passion.

1. It is blasphemy. This is a strong statement. I need to state as clearly as possible. Jesus Christ is one person with two natures. The one person in him is the Person of the Second Person of the Godhead. Jesus Christ is the Son of God clothed in human flesh. When the Son of God took on human nature, he unites in that one person a human nature and a divine nature. These two natures cannot be divided. Neither can they be fused together to form a new nature or person. What this means is that when we attempt to act out Christ on stage, we are trying to act out the Person of the Son of God in human flesh. The sufferings of Christ are not the sufferings of a mere perfect man. It is the sufferings at the same time of the very Son of God. How do you reenact this on stage? How can sinful depraved man depict and dramatize the Son of God in his sufferings?

2. Second, the Bible is very careful not to discuss in details his agony. The best commentary of his suffering is in Isaiah 53. The chapter is known as "The Sufferings of the Messiah". Although the chapter uses words like "smitten", "bruised", "stricken", "despised", etc, it avoids the details of the physical agony of the Saviour. Thomas Manton, an old writer, said this concerning this chapter. "in this verse (v4), it doth not barely describe Christ's agonies and fears, but showeth the cause of it." There are reasons why the Bible deliberately leaves out the details of the physical pain. It does not want to paint a bloody picture of the cross and let the gruesome scene affect on minds and hearts wrongly. The Bible is concerned to show that Christ died for our sins. The greatest pain he suffered on the cross is not physical, but spiritual. He suffered the extreme wrath of God. God punished him fully with His divine wrath because he bore our sins. The weight of our sins was upon Him. And the wrath of God was against Him. This is what caused the pain. This is the reason why Christ cried out at the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."

3. When we put all the focus on the physical pain, we can misled a person's emotions and make

him sympathize with Christ without considering his saving claims. If a person becomes a Christian because he feels for Christ, and not because he feels for his own sins, then he follows Christ for the wrong reason. Christ does not need us to sympathize with Him. For this reason, He does not overemphasize his pain to win our emotions. His death is designed to save us, not to make us feel for Him. When we reject Christ, we should be the one who should be pitied. His death is a victorious way to lead us out of sin and misery. If we forget this spiritual purpose in the death of Christ, we lose the meaning of the atonement. One wrong view of the atonement says that Christ's death is only an example to inspire us to sacrifice our lives for a good cause. We should be willing to do the same if we want to serve God fully or do good to humanity. This is a wrong view of the atoning death of Christ. Whenever we think of the cross, we should think of it as a victorious death over sin. The work of Christ is incomplete if we think only of his death and not his resurrection.

4. When we watch a reconstructed Christ on the silver screen, we are in danger of forming a wrong impression of Christ. In most mission schools, the picture of Christ is hung in the classrooms and along the school halls. I went to such a school when I was younger. The portrait of Christ hung reverently everywhere. They all looked the same to me. They all showed a man with a tanned complexion and a nicely trimmed beard. When I became a new Christian, I prayed with this picture of Christ in my mind. Moving pictures are very powerful mind-forming tools. After watching them, they can leave behind a deep impression and image in our mind. After the show is over, the image lingers in the mind. Uninformed viewers can wrongly associate the Hollywood image of Christ with the real Christ in the Bible.

5. Finally, Gibson's Christ is an RA-rated Christ. By adding violence and blood into the movie, he has made Christ less available for all. When Christ was with his disciples, his disciples were annoyed that children were crowding around the Lord. Christ rebuked them and told them that the kingdom of God is also for them. Gibson rates Christ according to his standard. The outcome is a Christ meant only for adults who want to see blood and violence at Golgotha. The gospel is for all. It is for mums and dads, boys and girls.

6. Finally, Isaiah in 53:1 says that the message of Christ's suffering is a "report." It is a report that needs to be preached and proclaimed. It is not a script for reenactment on stage. We should never dramatize Christ and use it to save souls. Isaiah knew the offense of preaching such a report. Therefore he cries out, "Who hath believed our report?" He knew that the message of a suffering Messiah to bear our sins would be a message that bring offense to many. Why is it that people who want to find out about Christ are not visiting the churches to discover the truths about Christ, but are instead flocking to cinema to watch Hollywood's version of Christ? This is because the truths hurt. The truth the Church proclaims to the world is that Christ died to save sinners. But Hollywood's Christ is a show that does not put this saving truth to the hearers. At the end of the show, when the curtains come down, a patron can leave the cinema still without the conviction that he needs to leave his sins to follow Christ fully. But then a movie of Christ that lacks the saving message is quite a useless movie.

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