

“THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST”

“The Gospel In A Nutshell”

Scripture Reading – Romans, 5:1-11

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

‘Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.’

John, 3:16, NIV

This series is based on the book ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST AND THE PURPOSE OF LIFE’.

Three years ago, Mel Gibson's film ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’ debuted amidst media hype, audience participation and bitter controversy. Whilst critics scorned, denounced, and dismissed the work as a piece of narrow-minded religious propaganda, Christians wept openly in cinemas across the country and around the world. Some used the film as an evangelistic tool to enable them to show their non-Christian family members and friends how Jesus had suffered for their sins. Many reports told of people being saved in their cinema seats.

This series, ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’, gives us opportunity to discover what the Bible says about the life, death, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus...

“THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL”

(Note: this sermon is not based on the teaching within the book written by Adrian Rogers)

C:\ My Documents\Word\Ministry\David Ellison\
Books\The Passion of the Christ\01 The Gospel In A Nutshell

‘A medieval monk announced that he would be preaching next Sunday evening on the theme: ‘THE LOVE OF GOD’. As the shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the monastery windows, the congregation gathered. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lit a candle and carried it to the cross. First, he illuminated the crown of thorns... then, the two wounded hands... then, the marks of the spear wound. In the hush that fell, he blew out the candle and left the chancel. There was nothing else to say.’

Martin Luther described our text, **John, 3:16**, as ‘THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL’...

1. THE GIVER

‘Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.’

John, 3:16, NIV

This verse tells us that the initiative for salvation lies with God.

‘Sometimes Christianity is presented in such a way that it sounds as if God had to be pacified, as if he had to be persuaded to forgive. Sometimes men speak as if they would draw a picture of a stern, angry, unforgiving God and a gentle, loving, forgiving Jesus. Sometimes men present the Christian message in such a way that it sounds as if Jesus did something which changed the attitude of God to men from condemnation to forgiveness. But this text tells us that it was with God that it all started. It was God who sent his Son, and he sent him because he loved men. At the back of everything is the love of God.’

William Barclay

Have you ever received a gift?

How did it make you feel when someone gave you that gift? Did you consider that the giver had you in mind when the gift was purchased and given? Did you consider the gift to be something you would have bought for yourself? Did you like it? How did you react when you saw it? How genuinely gracious were you when it was accepted?

Have you ever received an anonymous gift?

When I was younger, our family car was stolen and most of our Army ‘stuff’ was inside. In reality, my parents at the time did not have enough money to replace it. Someone in the Corps purchased replacements and gave them to the Commanding Officer who gave them to us. We did not know then who gave them... and, whilst I now know who gave them, none of the rest of my family knows the anonymous giver.

God is not anonymous in his giving.

Sometimes, we do not understand how he operates... and that is not surprising, because ‘GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY, HIS PURPOSE TO PERFORM’.

I know not why God’s wondrous grace to me he hath made known;

Nor why, unworthy of such grace, he claimed me for his own.

Daniel Webster Whittle, SASB 730:1

Many people today think that no one cares for them or loves them. As for God...?

'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

Romans, 5:8, NIV

'WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS'... these are amazing words.

God sent Jesus Christ to die for us, not because we were good enough, but because he just loved us. Whenever you feel uncertain about God's love for you, remember that he loved you even before you turned to him.

Think about this truth... as a demonstration of his love, God gave his Son.

'God's love never ceases... never. Though we spurn him, ignore him, reject him, despise him, and disobey him, He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love, and our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn his love any more than our stupidity jeopardises it. God does not love us less if we fail. God does not love us more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.'

Max Lucado

God's gift of Jesus is motivated by his own pure and unadulterated love...

2. THE GIFT

'Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".'

John, 3:16, NIV

'If I wrote down every thought I have ever thought and every deed I have ever done, men would call me a monster of depravity.'

Somerset Maugham

The essence of our problem is sin.

Sin is rebellion against God, and none of us is any better in this regard than any other.

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'

Romans, 3:23, NIV

'Some sins seem bigger than others because their obvious consequences are much more serious. Murder, for example, seems to us to be worse than hatred, and adultery seems worse than pride. But this does not mean that because we only commit "little" sins we deserve eternal life. All sins make us sinners, and all sins cut us off from our holy God. All sins, therefore, lead to death (because they disqualify us from living with God), regardless of how great or small they seem. Don't minimize "little" sins or overrate "big" sins, all sin separates us from God.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

Sin is a problem to us in at least four different ways...



THE POLLUTION OF SIN

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, for example, are not 'THE TEN SUGGESTIONS' or 'THE TEN IMPOSSIBILITIES'. God's commands are not meant to be broken in deed or in spirit. Those of us who drive should all have a valid Driving Licence. One offence stops it from being 'clean'. One offence against God's commands makes our lives unclean.



THE POWER OF SIN

The things that we do wrong have an addictive power. Usually, we need no encouragement to sin whilst not to sin takes real effort. Eventually, if left unchecked, it seems as though sin has so overpowered us that we cannot do what we should, even if we wanted to.



THE PENALTY FOR SIN

When Ian Huntley was found guilty of the murders of Holly and Jessica, what went through your mind? Did you feel that life in prison was a just penalty? Perhaps a thought went through your mind about something else that should happen to him! When we see children molested, old people attacked in their homes or babies battered, we long for the people who have done these things to be punished. Nevertheless, our wrongs, our sins deserve punishment as well – and according to the Bible, we deserve death.



THE PARTITION OF SIN

The things we do wrong create a barrier between us and God. When we sin, we do not just deserve physical death, we experience a spiritual death – isolation from God.

'Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.'

Isaiah, 59:1-2, NIV

The solution to our problem is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ...

Jesus Christ became our substitute and experienced our problem of sin.

'At the end of each day, as the prisoners of war working on the Burma Railway during Word War II returned to camp, the tools were collected from the work party. On one occasion, a Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing and demanded to know which man had taken it. He began to rant and rave, working himself up into a paranoid fury and ordered whoever was guilty to step forward. No one moved. "All die! All die!", he shrieked, cocking and aiming his rifle at the prisoners. At that moment, one man stepped forward and the guard clubbed him to death with his rifle while he stood silently to attention. Later, when the tools were counted again, no shovel was missing. That one man had gone forward as a substitute to save others.'

"MIRACLE ON THE RIVER KWAI", Ernest Gordon

In the same way, Jesus became our substitution.

'Cicero described crucifixion as "THE MOST CRUEL AND HORRIBLE OF TORTURES". Jesus – instead of you – was stripped and tied to a whipping post. Jesus – instead of you – was flogged with four or five thongs of leather interwoven with sharp jagged bone and lead until his very muscles, sinews and bowels were open to exposure. Jesus – instead of you – was taken to the Praetorium where a crown of thorns was thrust onto his head and he – instead of you – was mocked by a battalion of 600 men and hit about the face and head. Jesus – instead of you – was forced to carry a heavy cross bar on his bleeding shoulders until he collapsed, and Simon of Cyrene was press-ganged into carrying it for him.

'When they reached the site of crucifixion, Jesus – instead of you – was stripped naked and laid on the cross. Jesus – instead of you – had six inch nails driven into his forearms, just above the wrist. Jesus – instead of you – had his knees twisted sideways so that the ankles could be nailed to the cross. Jesus – instead of you – was lifted high on the cross, which was then dropped into a socket on the ground. There Jesus – instead of you – was left to hang in intense heat and unbearable thirst, exposed to the ridicule of the crowd. Jesus – instead of you – hung there in unthinkable pain for six hours while his life slowly drained away.'

"QUESTIONS OF LIFE", Nicky Gumbel (emphasis added, mine)

Why did God give 'HIS ONE AND ONLY SON' as a penalty for our sinfulness?

*He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good,
That we might go at last to Heaven, saved by his precious blood.*

*There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate of Heaven, and let us in.*

Cecil Frances Alexander, SASB 133:3-4

'Thank God for his Son – a gift too wonderful for words!'

II Corinthians, 9:15, NIV

3. THE RECIPIENT

'Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".'

John, 3:16, NIV

This verse tells us of the width of the love of God.

'It was the world that God so loved. It was not a nation; it was not good people; it was not only the people who loved him; it was the world. The unlovable and the unlovely, the lonely who have no one else to love them, the man who loves God and the man who never thinks of him, the man who rests in the love of God and the man who spurns it – all are included in this vast inclusive love of God.'

William Barclay

The Christmas Message has a verse that I have struggled with.

'The heavenly host said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests".'

Luke, 2:14, NIV

Does this verse mean that God's favour rests on all men... or only on a select few?

Jesus was given to the world, but the world did not receive him. However, some did...

'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.'

John, 1:11-13, NIV

'Although Christ created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him. Even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him, although the entire Old Testament pointed to his coming.

'All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, this new birth changes us from the inside out – rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family. Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family. Have you asked Christ to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in Christ.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

*'He opened the life gate that all may go in.'
'Calvary love has made the stair a very wide one.'*

Nonetheless, it is up to us to actually receive Jesus...

'Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".'

John, 3:16, NIV

Everyone likes receiving gifts... but when it comes to God's gift, not everyone does!

'In 1830, George Wilson was convicted of robbing the United States Mail and was sentenced to be hanged. President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson, but he refused to accept it. The matter went to Chief Justice Marshall, who concluded that Wilson would have to be executed. "A pardon is a slip of paper", wrote Marshall, "the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged".'

Two thousand years ago, God – through his one and only Son – issued a pardon.

However, just like in the case of George Wilson, the value of that pardon is determined by whether or not it is accepted. You do not have to accept God's gift – you can reject it. These words of Jesus mean absolutely nothing if we do not receive the gift of love God freely offers.