

"THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST"

"Why Did Jesus Have To Die?"

Scripture Reading – Isaiah, 53:2-12

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

I Peter, 3:18a, 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.

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Books\The Passion Of The Christ\02 Why Did Jesus Have To Die?
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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...

"WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?"

Eddie Slovik was the only American soldier executed for desertion during World War II.

'Private Eddie Slovik had come from a very troubled and difficult background and seemed to be getting his life together when he received his army draft notice. He completed his training and was shipped to Europe, but his first experience of combat so terrified him that he laid down his rifle and refused to return to his unit. Although he knew the sentence for desertion in time of war was death by firing squad, Slovik did not believe he would really be executed. As the case moved through the military justice system, it became more and more obvious that Slovik had deserted and the law was clear on his punishment. Even though no one involved with the case was eager to carry out this duty, Private Eddie Slovik was executed for desertion. The details of the case were kept under wraps for many years until his widow finally learned the truth that her husband had not died in combat, but by the hands of a military firing squad.'

Many people in America struggled with this truth when it was finally revealed.

Some questioned: "WHY DID THIS YOUNG MAN REALLY HAVE TO DIE?"

It is a question that could never be answered with finality, or to everyone's satisfaction.

In the case of another young man in the prime of his life, who was executed by state authorities nearly two thousand years earlier, we can say with the authority of God's Word that Jesus really did have to die... Seven hundred years before Jesus walked on earth, Isaiah wrote...

'Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

Isaiah, 53:4-6, NIV

Why did Jesus have to die?

Some people argue that Jesus was nothing more than a religious martyr who died for what he believed in. Others argue that he died as an example to show us how to die with dignity. Still others argue that his death was a first-century miscarriage of justice in which an innocent man died tragically at the hands of his enemies.

We can say today, on the authority of God's Word, why Jesus had to die...

'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

I Peter, 3:18a, NIV

Here in this statement is God's answer to the question: 'WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?'...

1. THE SUFFERING PASSION OF THE CROSS

'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

1 Peter, 3:18a, NIV

Jesus had to die because sin always brings suffering and death.

God's holiness demands that someone must suffer for sin. God's grace enables the suffering we deserved to fall upon his Son. The agony Jesus suffered in Gethsemane, in his beatings and scourging, and on the cross is what is meant by 'THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST'.

'Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.'

1 Peter, 3:18a, NKJV

CHRIST SUFFERED EMOTIONAL AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

The cross was hours away when Jesus arrived at Gethsemane with his disciples.

'GETHESEMANE' literally means 'OLIVE PRESS'; the place where olives were crushed under intense pressure to extract their oil. The place speaks symbolically of the extreme emotional pressure experienced by Jesus. On his way to Gethsemane, Jesus crossed the Kidron River, which was flowing red at the time, crimsoned by the blood of thousands of Passover lambs sacrificed in Jerusalem. Doubtless this crimson stream spoke to him of his own blood that was going to be poured out very soon.

'Jesus knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done".'

Luke, 22:41b-42, NIV

JESUS DRANK FROM THIS CUP THE POLLUTION OF SIN.

All the sin of the world was distilled in the cup of suffering that Jesus had to drink for us. This means that blasphemy against God was in that cup. Rape and adultery and sexual perversion was in that cup, along with the bitterness of child abuse and wife beating. Adolf Hitler's gas chambers were in that cup. The murder of children by abortion was in that cup. Satanic worship was in that cup. Pride, lust, envy, self-righteousness, and every other vile sin was in that cup... and Jesus had to drink it to experience the pollution of every drop of it.

JESUS DRANK FROM THIS CUP THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

God held back nothing when he laid the suffering for our sins upon Christ. Jesus took the full force of the Father's fiery wrath against sin. No one ever suffered like Jesus. In his passion, Jesus took upon himself the hell that we deserved. In agony he prayed more earnestly. He was not wrestling with God the Father or with Satan. Jesus was wrestling with his own humanity. His agony was so great that an angel had to come and strengthen him so he could go to the cross.

'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

II Corinthians, 5:21, NIV

CHRIST SUFFERED EXCRUCIATING PAIN ON THE CROSS

Jesus endured an inhumanly brutal scourging.

The victim's hands were tied to a post and two soldiers whipped the victim with leather thongs that had bits of bone, glass, and metal, designed to tear away the victim's flesh. By the time the scourging was over, the victim would be laid bare. The soldiers knew how to administer a scourging to bring a person to the point of death without actually killing him.

Jesus endured other tortures described in the Gospels.

We read that soldiers punched him in the face, beat him with bamboo clubs, and pressed a crown of thorns upon his head. Only when all this was over was Jesus forced to carry the heavy crossbeam to his own crucifixion.

Jesus endured the excruciating pain of crucifixion.

Crucifixion was one of the most brutal and painful ways to die. Every detail was designed to produce maximum pain and to prolong a person's death. The nails were put through nerves to cause fiery pain to shoot through the body. The knees were bent so that the victim would slump down and begin to suffocate. The only way to breathe was to push up with one's legs on those nailed feet, which would cause excruciating pain to again shoot through the body.

Cicero described crucifixion as: *'the most cruel and hideous of tortures'*.

The word 'EXCRUCIATING' means 'OUT OF THE CROSS'.

The Latin word 'EXCRUCIATUS' was coined to describe the worst kind of pain and suffering. Jesus suffered in our place because someone had to suffer in order to fulfil God's righteous penalty against sin.

The agony of Jesus should bring tears to our eyes and sorrow to our hearts to think that the One so perfect and innocent should suffer and die instead of us...

2. THE SETTLED PROVISION OF THE CROSS

'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'

1 Peter, 3:18a, NIV

Jesus had to die because sin demands full payment to the holiness of God.

The work of Christ was unique and never need be repeated. Christ died once and for all for all sins. The New Testament writers say this same thing quite often. The New Testament writers were completely convinced that on the cross something happened which never needs to happen again and that in that happening, sin was finally defeated. On the cross, God dealt with man's sin in a way which is adequate for all sin, for all mankind, for all of time.

When Christ died, he died once and for all (see Romans, 6:10).

The priestly sacrifices in the Temple have to be repeated daily but Christ made the perfect sacrifice once and for all when he offered himself up (see Hebrews, 7:27).

Christ was once and for all offered to bear the sin of many (see Hebrews, 9:28).

We are sanctified through the offering of Christ once and for all (see Hebrews, 10:10).

Peter states that the sacrifice of Jesus was 'FOR SINS'.

Christ died once and for all sins. The death of Christ is the sacrifice that atones for the sins of mankind. Sin is that which interrupts the relationship which should exist between God and man. The object of a sacrifice is to restore that lost relationship. The death of Christ on the cross, once and for all, however we explain it, avails to restore the lost relationship between God and man. Through what happened on the Cross, we may enter into a new relationship with God.

‘When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished”. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.’

John, 19:30, NIV

The phrase 'IT IS FINISHED' in Greek is one word 'TETELESTAI'.

'TETELESTAI' means 'PAID IN FULL'. When a man was put in prison, a certificate of his sentence would be nailed to his prison door stating his crime and punishment. When the criminal had served his time, the judge would write across this certificate 'PAID IN FULL', and give it to the prisoner so he could never be punished again for that crime. If anyone accused him again, the former convict could produce this certificate and say, "You cannot touch me; my debt to society has been paid in full".

What debt did Jesus pay in full on the cross?

Your sin-debt and mine! When the devil comes today to taunt and accuse you of sin, you can point to God's Word and say, "You cannot touch me, because this is the certificate that my crimes have been paid in full once and for all by Jesus on the Cross".

If you know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the words 'PAID IN FULL' are written in the crimson red blood of Christ over your sin-debt in the records of the courts of heaven...

3. THE SUBSTITUTIONARY PURPOSE OF THE CROSS

‘Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.’

I Peter, 3:18a, NIV

Jesus had to die because we needed someone to act as our substitute.

Christ was the Just One, completely innocent of any sin, but he went to the cross and died for us – who had already been tried and convicted in heaven's courtroom. Because God is a God of infinite love and mercy, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit drew up a plan in the councils of eternity that called for God the Son to take our sin upon himself and go to the cross. The cross was not an accident or an afterthought but was in the heart and mind of God from all eternity.

The sacrifice of Jesus was 'vicarious' – explicit, sensational, shocking, vivid.

That the just should suffer for the unjust is an extraordinary thing. At first sight it looks like an injustice. The suffering of Christ was for us; and the mystery is that he who deserved no suffering bore that suffering for us who deserved to suffer.

Edwin H Robertson wrote: *‘Only forgiveness without reason can match sin without excuse’.*

Jesus became our substitution.

*‘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)

‘Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.’

Isaiah, 53:4-5, NIV

Why did the just die for the unjust?

*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.
Cecil Frances Alexander, SASB 133:3*

4. THE SAVING POWER OF THE CROSS

‘Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.’

I Peter, 3:18a, NIV

Jesus had to die in order to bring us to God.

The phrase 'TO BRING YOU TO GOD' is a technical term that means 'TO GAIN AUDIENCE AT COURT'. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, we now have an open access to God. We may

come boldly to the throne of grace and obtain mercy. We also have access to God's marvellous grace to meet our every day needs.

The word 'TO BRING' is 'PROSAGEIN', and it has two vivid backgrounds...

THE JEWISH BACKGROUND

It is used in the Old Testament when bringing to God those who are to be priests.

It is God's instruction: "YOU SHALL BRING AARON AND HIS SONS TO THE DOOR OF THE TENT OF MEETING" (see **Exodus, 29:4**).

The point is this – as the Jews saw it: only priests had the right of close access to God. In the Temple the layman might come so far... he could pass through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Israelites... but there he must stop. Into the Court of the Priests, into the nearer presence of God, he could not go; and of the priests, only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies. But Jesus Christ brings us to God; he opened the way for all men to his nearer presence.

'When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.'

Matthew, 27:50-51a, NIV

THE GREEK BACKGROUND

In the New Testament the corresponding noun 'PROSAGOGÉ', meaning 'THE RIGHT OF ACCESS', is used three times:

Through Christ we have access to grace (see **Romans, 5:2**). Through Christ we have access to God the Father (see **Ephesians, 2:18**). Through Christ we have boldness and access and confidence to come to God (see **Ephesians, 3:12**).

In the Greek, this had a specialised meaning.

At the court of kings, there was an official called the 'PROSAGOGÉUS', the introducer, the giver of access, and it was his function to decide who should be admitted into the king's presence and who should be kept out. He, as it were, held the keys of access. It is Jesus Christ, through what he did, who gives men access to God.

'In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... For through him we have access to the Father.'

Ephesians, 2:13, 18, NIV

Through Jesus Christ alone, we have access into Heaven.

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 133:4

"JESUS DIED SO WE MIGHT BE FORGIVEN"