

“THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST”

“Who Crucified Jesus?”

Scripture Reading – Matthew, 27:33-50

The governor’s soldiers led Jesus away to crucify him. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means ‘THE PLACE OF THE SKULL’). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: ‘THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS’.

Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others”, they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’”. In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah”. Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him”. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

‘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

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

Two 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 aloud and 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.

C:\ My Documents\Word\Ministry\David Ellison\
Books\The Passion Of The Christ\03 Who Crucified Jesus?

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...

“WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS?”

Of all the controversy stirred up by the release of the film ‘THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST’, perhaps the biggest firestorm was created by the question: ‘WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS?’.

Many leaders in the Jewish community reacted angrily, saying the film would inflame anti-Semitism by bringing up the charge that the Jews killed Jesus and are guilty of his blood. To help alleviate concern, the only phrase spoken in Hebrew on the film which is not subtitled into English is when the Jews say to Pilate, **“LET HIS BLOOD BE ON US AND OUR CHILDREN”** (see **Matthew, 27:25**).

DID THE JEWS CRUCIFY JESUS?

Over the centuries, many Jewish people have suffered tremendous persecution and painful death because the Jews were considered to be ‘Christ killers’. Whilst it is true that one section of the Jewish community clamoured for his death, only ignorance or prejudice would blame the Jews as the singular people who are responsible for the crucifixion.

It is worth remembering that Jesus himself was a Jew. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord, was a Jew. Christ’s disciples were Jews. The first members of the Church were Jews. Another Jew, the apostle Paul, was the mightiest missionary who ever lived.

We should not judge the entire Jewish people by one segment of Judaism.

Likewise, we would seek not to judge Islam by the segment of fundamental Muslims bent on terrorism. We would hate for the entire church of Jesus Christ to be judged by one segment of Christianity. We have, after all, had more than our share of moral scandals and failures in the church. Others would point to acts done in the name of Christianity that they would rightly describe as acts of persecution and terrorism (Consider the acts of the Ku Klux Klan on American blacks or even The Spanish Inquisition).

DID THE ROMANS CRUCIFY JESUS?

The fact is that Jesus was crucified under Roman authority with Roman officials acting as judge and executioner. Pilate was a compromising, pussyfooting politician who tried to wash his hands and protest his innocence whilst condemning Jesus to a scourging and the cross. Those who carried out the punishment were, in a sense, only pawns obeying the orders that came from higher up.

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Acts, 2:22-23, NIV



WERE YOU THERE WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED MY LORD?

The cross is the turning point of all history.

The cross is more than a beautiful ornament to wear around your neck or an insignia at the top of a church steeple. The cross is God's testimony to the sinfulness of human nature. The cross is the mightiest demonstration of the unfathomable love of God. The cross is the only hope for a dying and rotten society.

Seven hundred years before Christ, the Bible gives us the answer.

'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

The answer to the question: 'WHO CRUCIFIED JESUS?', is that my sin and your sin and the sin of all people in the world nailed our precious Saviour to the cross. Our sins were the nails that held Jesus on the cross and our hard hearts were the hammers that drove those nails in. If we want to know who was responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, all we have to do is to look in the mirror.

This truth was not lost on the director the film 'THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST'.

Mel Gibson's hand held the hammer that drove the nails into the hands of 'Jesus'. He was saying, in effect by that act, that his sin nailed Jesus to the cross. We could quite truthfully and symbolically place our hands around his, for we are likewise to blame.

For those who would argue they were not there, I want us to consider 'WHAT CRUCIFIED JESUS'...

"WHAT CRUCIFIED JESUS?"

What inclinations in the human heart caused Jesus to be crucified?

The answers are found at the foot of the cross itself, for God arranged that a cross-section of humanity was there when Jesus died. We are going to look at Matthew, 27 and call the roll of the sin that lurks in the human heart.



SELF-RIGHTEOUS RELIGION CRUCIFIED JESUS

'Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.'

Matthew, 27:1-2, NIV

The chief priests and elders were the religious leaders of Israel.

Many of them were Pharisees, who were the most religious of all the religious. They kept the Sabbath with such care that they would not even eat the egg that a chicken had laid

on the Sabbath. They would not kill a flea on the Sabbath in case they were accused of hunting. If they got a pin in the sole of their shoe, they could not take it out because they could not work. Make no mistake, this was a religious crowd, but they still arrested Jesus and condemned him to death.

Religion without true repentance and change of heart is a dangerous thing.

Many go to church every Sunday and go through the ritual of singing songs and giving in the offerings. They are religious, but lost. Many people in church have religion, but they do not have righteousness. They have Christian culture, but they do not have Christ. They have never come to the realisation, that Jesus does not want religion, he wants a relationship. Many people need to turn away from their religion and turn to Jesus Christ.

Jesus died because of those who practiced self-righteous religion...



COLD-EYED HYPOCRISY CRUCIFIED JESUS

'When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned", he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood". "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility". So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.'

Matthew, 27:3-5, NIV

Why did Judas, one of the disciples, betray Jesus for thirty silver coins?

There can be no ifs or buts about it. Judas was a first class hypocrite. He deceived the disciples in that they elected him treasurer of the group, even though he was a thief. At the Last Supper, when Jesus handed the bread to Judas to identify him as the betrayer, the other disciples still did not realise that Judas was the one.

Judas never lost his salvation; because he never had it.

The Greek word for 'HYPOCRITE' referred to an actor in a play who wore a mask so he could easily adapt to and play several different parts. Judas was an accomplished hypocrite who successfully hid behind the mask of spirituality and fooled the disciples – but not Jesus, nor himself.

Many say they will not become a Christian because the Church is full of hypocrites.

Notice that the other eleven disciples did not stop following Christ because of the actions of a hypocrite. It would be foolish to allow hypocrites to stop you believing in Christ and becoming a Christian. Those who will not go to church with hypocrites will find themselves in their company in hell for all eternity.

A hypocrite is a counterfeit Christian.

People counterfeit money, credit cards, and passports but they do not counterfeit chewing gum wrappers. Why is that? Because chewing gum wrappers have no real value. Every counterfeit Christian is a testimony to the worth and the validity of the real.

Jesus died because of those who practiced cold-eyed hypocrisy...



COWARDLY COMPROMISE CRUCIFIED JESUS

‘It was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas”, they answered. “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”’

Matthew, 27:15-18, 20-22, NIV

Pilate considered himself to be in an impossible situation.

Jesus was brought before him and after questioning Jesus, Pilate decided that Jesus was innocent of all the charges against him. Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. However, the religious leaders stirred up the people who called for Jesus to be crucified. To make things even more complicated for the Roman Governor, his wife had had a disturbing dream and she warned her husband not to do anything to Jesus.

Pilate refused to listen to the voices of reason and revelation.

Fearing the crowd and any possible trouble that might come his way if news of unrest reached Rome, he showed himself to be a cowardly and compromising politician who thought more of keeping his own job than actually carrying out the real duties of it. Pilate knew he was doing wrong when he handed Jesus over to be flogged, but he wanted to keep hold of his post. He wanted peace and comfort at all costs.

Many cover their cowardly compromise claiming, ‘well, a man has got to live’.

No! He does not! He has to die and then face God. Pilate preferred to make no decision at all about Jesus, but indifference is often the worst decision we can make. Because he was a coward, Pilate would not take a stand for Jesus. He wanted peace and comfort, but he was soon replaced in his post and later committed suicide.

Jesus died because of those who practiced cowardly compromise...



THOUGHTLESS CONFORMITY CRUCIFIED JESUS

‘The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas”, they answered. “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”’

Matthew, 27:20-23, NIV

I have some doubt as to whether or not the people really did know what they were doing. They were probably unaware of how important their choice really was. All they knew was

that their religious leaders wanted them to do this, and that the rest of the crowd were calling out for Barabbas to be released, and for Jesus to be crucified.

These people were thoughtless conformers.

People like to go along with the crowd. They do not want to stand out, or stand against what the majority are doing. Unfortunately, the crowd is almost always wrong. As Christians, we follow the narrow way whilst the world marches to hell along the broad way; we have to swim against the tide of popular worldly wisdom that would lead us into hell.

Those who are thoughtless conformers have no excuse.

Perhaps the crowd in Jesus’ day were convinced that their religious leaders knew best and they had no reason to know anything different. Nonetheless, ignorance is not innocence. They could have and should have known better. Others who knew better were frightened into silence by the baying mob.

Jesus died because of those who practiced thoughtless conformity...



HARD-HEARTED CRUELTY CRUCIFIED JESUS

‘Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers round him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.’

Matthew, 27:27-31, NIV

Scripture states clearly the cruelty of the Roman executioners.

The soldiers who brutalised and beat Jesus were hard-hearted men in whom the milk of human kindness had curdled.

We live in a world like this today.

Some people are absolutely cold-hearted, especially when it comes to Jesus and the crucifixion. A person can be hard-hearted without actually killing someone. The soldiers at the cross represent the hard-hearted cruelty that crucified Jesus.

Jesus died because of those who practiced hard-hearted cruelty...



CASUAL INDIFFERENCE CRUCIFIED JESUS

‘And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.’

Matthew, 27:36, NIV

A large crowd of people followed Jesus to the cross, and not all of them were harbouring hatred or murder in their hearts. Some were casual observers who simply sat down and

watched Jesus being crucified. The crowd did not openly oppose him, but neither did they speak up to protest or try to prevent his death.

Who are these people today?

We all know those who when they hear of some accident or some tragedy will rush to the scene in order to witness it for themselves. It is a strange behaviour when someone wants to witness another's pain and suffering.

*Is it nothing to you that his cross speaks our shame?
Is it nothing to you, for whose cleansing he came,
That our guilt made his Calvary and pierced his hands through?
Is it nothing to you? Is it nothing, nothing to you?
Albert E Mingay, SASB 245:3*

Jesus died because of those who practised casual indifference...

CYNICAL SCEPTICISM CRUCIFIED JESUS

'Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. He saved others', they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God'". In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.'

Matthew, 27:39-44, NIV

The final group of people at the foot of the cross were the cynics and the sceptics who taunted and mocked the Lord Jesus as he hung there in agony. These cynics misquoted Jesus' words about the temple and they minimised his death by taunting him to come down from the cross and save himself.

A cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Cynicism comes out of the heart. A person is not a sinner because he is a sceptic. He is a sceptic because he is a sinner. Those who claim to have an intellectual problem with the cross have not; they are rotten with sin. Those who claim they cannot believe; will not believe – they choose not to believe.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not contrary to reason, it is beyond reason.

I have enough problems with the things I do understand about the Bible without taking on the doubts that others may have. Why should another's cynicism or scepticism influence your choice to believe in God?

Jesus died because of those who practiced cynicism and scepticism...

"JESUS DIED FOR SIN; TO BRING US TO GOD"

In spite of all those attitudes and all those people who helped hold the nails and hammers that pinned Jesus to the cross, God allowed his beloved Son to die in agony and blood to save sinful people like us.

What was really happening on the cross?

GOD JUDGED SIN AT THE CROSS

THE CROSS WAS JUDGEMENT AT ITS SUREST

Think about this. If God did not spare his own Son from the judgement of the cross when the sin of the entire world was put upon Jesus, what makes any of us think God will spare us if we reject Christ and stand before him with our sin still upon us?

The cross was God's full and final judgement against sin.

'Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Jesus!'

Romans, 5:9, NIV

GOD PROVED HIS LOVE AT THE CROSS

THE CROSS WAS LOVE AT ITS GREATEST

If there were ever a promise that God would have wanted to renege on, or a time when he wanted to change his mind, it would be his promise to send Jesus to the cross for our sins. But God kept his promise and did not spare his Son.

The cross was a true demonstration of God's love.

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

Romans, 5:8, NIV

GOD DISPLAYED HIS GRACE AT THE CROSS

THE CROSS WAS GRACE AT ITS FULLEST

If God would give us Jesus, there is nothing else he would withhold. With Jesus, we get everything. Here is amazing love and abounding grace toward those who crucified Jesus, for each and every one of us is guilty of the blood of Jesus.

'God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'

Romans, 8:32, NIV

*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*