

# **The Passion of the Christ**

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## **Introduction**

Wednesday, February 25, 2004, was the opening day for the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” a movie of much conversation and interest. And the biggest discussion, it seems, was about the extent of the violence in this movie. One article on the movie said, “You must be prepared for whippings, flayings, beatings, the crunch of bones, the agony of screams, the cruelty of the sadistic centurions, the rivulets of blood that crisscross every inch of Jesus’ body.” Indeed the movie is very shocking and graphic.

One newspaper on that Wednesday contained on the front page two articles about the movie: one was quite positive in its comments, the other was rather negative. But both articles made the observation that the movie does leave out a great deal of the story of Jesus.

The more favorable article said, “The movie leaves so much untold about the story of Christ, but the good news is that we Christians get to tell the rest of that story.” And that is one very good way of looking at it. The other article said, “The movie drowns any message about Jesus’ life or teachings beneath torrents of blood.” “[And because the movie] offers scant information about Jesus prior to His final 12 hours of torture and crucifixion, the brutality has almost no context.”

Truly all the excessive violence will make no sense without first understanding the context. All that blood and gore (whether one is watching it on a movie screen or hearing about it in a gospel sermon) will have little meaning unless we first understand why it happened, and why it had to happen. Whether or not one should choose to see the movie, it is certainly a worthy study to better understand why Jesus had to suffer and die as He did.

In Romans chapter 11, Paul is talking about the initial rejection of Christ by the Jews and the opportunity for salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles. In the midst of this discussion, we find a short but important phrase in verse 22: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.”

This brief phrase actually summarizes the entire reason why Jesus suffered and died on the cross. These two divine attributes, God’s goodness and His severity, directly contributed to the suffering and death of Jesus the Christ. In fact, it seems appropriate to say that the whole story of the cross and the good news of the gospel is about the goodness and severity of God. Think about it...

1. The goodness of God demands that He also be severe. (As I’ve stated many times before...) God is so good and perfect and righteous that He has to be severe in punishing sin. Because of His holy nature, He abhors sin. He is completely insulted and repulsed by sin, and His wrath must be poured out upon all who are guilty of such. He has to severely punish sin or else He is not God!
2. Because of God’s goodness, He loves us so very much, and He does not want to pour out His wrath upon us. And so He determined, even before creation, that He would one day send His own Son to bear that punishment in our place. The debt of sin had to be paid; His severe nature demands such. But, by the goodness and graciousness of God, the debt was paid through the suffering and death of our Savior Jesus the Christ. God’s wrath was poured out upon Christ instead of upon us.

## **God Must Punish Sin**

- Deuteronomy 25:16 “For everyone who acts unjustly (or unrighteously) is an abomination unto the Lord your God.”
- Deuteronomy 32:4 “[God] is the Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; [He is] a God of truth and without iniquity, righteous and upright is He.”

- Psalm 5:4-6 “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”
- Psalm 11:4-7 “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.”
- Proverbs 6:16-19 “There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.”
- Isaiah 59:2 “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.”
- Habakkuk 1:13a (Habakkuk said of God) “Thine eyes are too pure to approve (or behold) evil, and Thou canst not look upon wickedness.”
- Hebrews 12:14 “Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”

Again, God is so good and perfect and righteous that He has to be severe in punishing sin or else He is not God.

### ***God’s Wrath Exemplified***

Consider now several examples and promises of the severe wrath of God. We’ll start here at the book of Genesis and go all the way through to the book of Revelation. This may seem to be a bit of overkill (and that, unfortunately, is a bit of a pun), but it is important to firmly establish that God has been and will always be consistently severe in pouring out His wrath upon all those who are wicked and disobedient.

- Genesis 6:5-7 God did what He said He would do; the purpose of the flood was not so we could have rainbows; purpose was to put to death possibly millions of people who were wicked (God is severe)
- Genesis 18:20; 19:24-25 The people of those cities were completely destroyed (God is severe)
- Numbers 16:31-33, 35 (3 men named Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who, along with 250 other men, rose up and rebelled against Moses and Aaron and, consequently, against God)
- Numbers 16:44-49 (v41 the whole congregation of Israel started to grumble against Moses and Aaron about what God had done in killing these other men; so what does God do? He sent a plague down upon the people to destroy them)

### ***God’s Wrath Prophesied***

- Isaiah 5:20-25
- Isaiah 13:6-13 (against Babylon for their wickedness)
- Isaiah 33:10-14
- Isaiah 66:15-17, 24
- Jeremiah 4:4
- Ezekiel 5:11-13 (against Jerusalem and the people of Israel)
- Nahum 1:2-6 (against Nineveh, who had repented during the time of Jonah, but later returned to evil)
- Zephaniah 1:14a, 17-18

There is a lot of violence in the Bible, and it is at the hand of God because of the sin of man. And these are just a few of the many, many passages throughout the OT that exemplify the wrath of God and promise that there is more to come for the wicked.

## ***God's Wrath Preached by Jesus***

Matthew 5:22 is the first of many recorded times that Jesus would refer to Hell. The Greek word is Gehenna, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew 'Valley of Hinnom'. The concept might have been new to a Gentile audience, but it certainly was not the first time the Jews had heard of such. This deep gorge, most likely just outside Jerusalem, is first mentioned back in the book of Joshua (15:8; 18:16).

According to 2 Chronicles (28:3; 33:6), this was the location where the Jews had once burned their children in sacrifice to the idol god Molech. According to Jeremiah (7:31; 19:2-6), it would be the place which would be overflowing with their corpses when God condemned them for their sins.

This valley later became the city dump, a place where would be thrown not only common garbage, but also the dead bodies of animals, criminals, and enemies. And there, amongst all the worms and maggots, was to be found a fire always burning.

There are several references to God's wrath, and punishment, and Gehenna all throughout the book of Matthew...

- Matthew 5:29
- Matthew 7:13-14, 19
- Matthew 8:11-12
- Matthew 10:28
- Matthew 11:20-24
- Matthew 13:40-42
- Matthew 18:8-9 (Mark 9:48 adds, "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." – reminiscent of the passage in Isaiah 66)
- Matthew 22:13-14
- Matthew 24:50-51 (regarding unfaithful servant; Luke 12:47-48 adds "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will receive but few.")
- Matthew 25:30 (unfaithful servant)
- Matthew 25:41 (scene of judgment)
- Matthew 26:24 (far worse and more painful to lose a valued possession than to have never had such; so also will the punishment be such that one would have been better off never to have been born)

We also need to briefly consider Luke 16:19-31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. This story was told by Jesus, not so much to give us exact details of what to expect after life, but mostly to illustrate that our actions upon this earth do have eternal consequences, consequences that may be vastly different than what was enjoyed during this life. Notice in v23 and v25 that the man who had apparently once trusted in his riches now was in "torment" and "agony."

All these passages which record the teaching of Jesus show clearly that God is severe and many will one day be on the receiving end of His divine wrath.

## ***God's Wrath Preached by Paul and Others***

- Romans 1:18, 32
- Romans 2:8-9
- Romans 6:20-21, 23
- Ephesians 5:3-5
- Philippians 3:18-19
- Colossians 3:5-6
- 1 Thessalonians 4:6
- 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9
- Hebrews 10:26-31
- Hebrews 12:25, 29

- 2 Peter 2:1-21
- 2 Peter 3:1-7
- Revelation 14:10-11, 19-20 (those who turn away from God)
- (Revelation 15 and 16 speak of the wrath of God)
- Revelation 19:17-21
- Revelation 20:11-15

As exhaustive as this list of passages may appear, you need to know that it is not anywhere close to being all the passages that speak of God's wrath poured out upon those who are guilty of sin. But they are presented for one primary purpose: as much as possible, we need to be overwhelmed by the severe wrath of God... so that we might be even more overwhelmed by His love and goodness.

### *Jesus Delivers Us from Wrath*

Because God is severe, He harshly punishes sin. But because He is good, God gave His one and only Son to bear the punishment that we deserve. Consider these verses...

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
- Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."
- 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus came and died to deliver us from the wrath of God.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 says that we as Christians are now not destined for wrath because our Lord Jesus Christ died for us. He took upon Himself the wrath that we deserved.
- Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus suffered death "so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."
- Hebrews 9:28 says that Christ was "offered once to bear the sins of many."
- 1 Peter 2:22, 24 says that Christ "committed no sin" and yet "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross."
- 1 Peter 3:18 says that "Christ also died for sins once for all."
- 1 John 2:2 says that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."
- 1 John 3:16 says, "He laid down His life for us."

Jesus didn't deserve to be beaten and killed; we do... because of our sins. But Jesus took our place.

### ⊕ Ephesians 2:1-5

When we consider the horrible crucifixion that occurred on that place of a skull (when watching it on a movie screen, or reading about it in Scripture, or listening to the story in a sermon), let us be reminded of the wonderful goodness of God.

The Bible says that God does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9), and therefore, because He loved the world so much, He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever would believe in Him should not perish (should not have to suffer the terrible wrath of God), but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

### *The Passion/Suffering of Jesus Was Necessary*

Let us be reminded of how difficult it was for Jesus our Savior to pay our debt for sin. Remember that Jesus prayed that somehow the horrors of bearing our punishment might be removed. According to Hebrews 5:7, He did so with loud crying and tears. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."

And then, while hanging on that cross, He spoke of the true pain and horror that ultimately comes to all sinners in judgment when He said, "Father, why have You forsaken Me?" That is what is due for the guilt of sin; that is what Jesus bore in the place of sinners: a terrible punishment culminating in the full and awful separation from God and life!

Remember that He had “laid aside His privileges” (Philippians 2:7); and thus in His humanity, he perhaps then feared what all mortal men fear: He was about to die with apparently no power of His own to do anything about it.

Surely the passion/suffering of Jesus was tremendous. And it was also necessary. The Bible shows us that Jesus didn’t just die; He suffered and died.

We usually think just about how Jesus had to die so that we could be saved. But after seeing so much in Scripture about the wrath of God and the horrific way in which He punishes sin, it should now be evident that Jesus had to violently suffer and die because that is the price that must be paid for sin. His suffering was not incidental; it was not just an insignificant detail leading up to His death. The passion/suffering of Jesus was a truly necessary part of purchasing our salvation.

Jesus Himself said that such would be necessary in Matthew 16:21 (see also Luke 18:31-33; 24:46; 1 Peter 2:21-24).

Jesus did not and could not experience a quick and painless death because that would not have been sufficient. It took all the beating and whipping and scourging; it took all that blood and pain. God hates sin so much that He truly and fully punishes those who sin, and thus Jesus, if He was going to fully bear the punishment for the sins of all mankind, He truly had to experience the full and very severe wrath of God!

You see, it wasn’t really the Jews and the Romans who beat and killed Jesus; it was God Himself pouring out His wrath upon the sins of the whole world!

Isaiah 53:4-5 says, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed."

It was not just the death of Christ that saves us; it was also the beating and the scourging, and it was all really at the hand of God Himself.

### ***God Displayed Publicly***

Consider one more passage...

#### **⊕ Romans 3:23-25**

This passage reinforces all that we’ve seen thus far, but notice in particular the phrase, “God displayed publicly...” The passion of Christ, His suffering and death is a picture that God intentionally displayed before the world.

- He wanted the world to see the goodness and severity of God.
- He wanted us to see a picture of the wages of sin being poured out upon the guilty sinner.
- He wanted us to see a picture of God’s love as one man, the divine Son of God, stood in our place on that awful day.

We weren’t there to see that demonstration. Perhaps therefore it is good that many have since tried to paint the picture for us. When you see the passion of the Christ, when you see His suffering and death, remember this: you are seeing how much God hates sin, and you are seeing how much God loves the world and wants us to be saved!