

## A News Anchor's Perspective on "The Passion of the Christ"

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There have been tons of e-mails and forwards floating around recently from those who have had the privilege of seeing Mel Gibson's *The Passion Of The Christ* prior to its actual release. I thought I'd give you my reaction after seeing it last [week.]

The screening was on the first night of "Elevate!" a weekend-long seminar for young people at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano. There were about 2,000 people there, and the movie was shown after several speakers had taken the podium. It started around 9:00 and finished around 11:00...about two hours in length. Frankly, I lost complete track of time - so I can't be sure.

I want you to know that I started in broadcasting when I was 13-years-old. I have been in the business of writing, performing, production and broadcasting for a long time. I have been a part of movies, radio, television, stage and other productions - so I know how things are done. I know about soundtracks and special effects and make-up and screenplays. I think I have seen just about every kind of movie or TV show ever made - from extremely inspirational to extremely gory. I read a lot - and have covered stories and scenes that still make me wince. I also have a vivid imagination, and have the ability to picture things as they must have happened - or to anticipate things as they will be portrayed. I have also seen an enormous amount of footage from Gibson's film, so I thought I knew what was coming.

But there is nothing in my existence - nothing I could have read, seen, heard, thought or known - that could have prepared me for what I saw on screen last night.

This is not a movie that anyone will "like". I don't think it's a movie anyone will "love". It certainly doesn't "entertain". There isn't even the sense that one has just watched a movie. What it is...an *experience* - on a level of primary emotion that is scarcely comprehensible. Every shred of human preconception or predisposition is utterly stripped away. No one will eat popcorn during this film. Some may not eat for days after they've seen it. Quite honestly, I wanted to vomit. It hits that hard.

I can see why some people are worried about how the film portrays the Jews. They should be worried. No, it's not anti-Semitic. What it is, is entirely shattering. There are no "winners". No one comes off looking "good" - except Jesus. Even His own mother hesitates. As depicted, the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day merely do what any of us would have done - and still do. They protected their perceived "place" - their sense of safety and security, and the satisfaction of their own "rightness". But everyone falters. Caiphus judges. Peter denies. Judas betrays. Simon the Cyrene balks. Mark runs away. Pilate equivocates. The crowd mocks. The soldiers laugh. Longinus still stabs with his pilus. The centurion still carries out his orders. And as Jesus fixes them all with a glance, they still turn away. The Jews, the Romans, Jesus' friends - they all fall. Everyone, except the Principal Figure. Heaven sheds a single, mighty tear - and as blood and water spew from His side, the complacency of all creation is eternally shattered.

The film grabs you in the first five seconds, and never lets go. The brutality, humiliation, and gore are almost inconceivable - and still probably does not go far enough. The scourging alone seems to never end, and you cringe at the sound and splatter of every blow - no matter how steely your nerves. Even those who have known combat or prison will have trouble, no matter their experience - because this Man was not conscripted. He went willingly, laying down His entirety for all. It is one thing for a soldier to die for his countrymen. It's something else entirely to think of even a common man dying for those who hate and wish to kill him. But this is no common man. This is the King of the Universe. The idea that anyone could or would have gone through such punishment is unthinkable - but this Man was completely innocent, completely holy - and paying the price for *others*. He screams as He is laid upon the cross, "Father, they don't know. They don't know..."

What Gibson has done is to use all of his considerable skill to portray the most dramatic moment of the most dramatic events since the dawn of time. There is no escape. It's a punch to the gut that puts you on the canvas, and you don't get up. You are simply confronted by the horror of what was done - what had to be done - and why. Throughout the entire film, I found myself apologizing.

What you've heard about how audiences have reacted is true. There was no sound after the film's conclusion. No noise at all. No one got up. No one moved. The only sound one could hear was sobbing. In all my years of public life, I have never heard anything like that.

I told many of you that Gibson had reportedly re-shot the ending to include more "hope" through the Resurrection? That's not true. The Resurrection scene is perhaps the shortest in the entire movie - and yet it packs a punch that can't be quantified. It is perfect. There is no way to negotiate the meaning out of it. It simply asks, "Now, what will you do?"

I'll leave the details to you, in the hope that you will see the film - but one thing above all stands out, and I have to tell you about it. It comes from the end of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness - where the Bible says Satan left him "until a more opportune time." I imagine Satan never quit tempting Christ, but this film captures beyond words the *most* opportune time. At every step of the way, Satan is there at Jesus' side - imploring Him to quit, reasoning with Him to give up, and seducing Him to surrender. For the first time, one gets a heart-stopping idea of the sense of madness that must have enveloped Jesus - a sense of the evil that was at His very elbow. The physical punishment is relentless - but it's the sense of psychological torture that is most overwhelming. He *should* have quit. He *should* have opened His mouth. He *should* have called 10,000 angels. No one would have blamed Him. What we *deserve* is obvious. But He couldn't do that. He wouldn't do that. He didn't do that. He doesn't do that. It was not and is not His character. He was *obedient*, all the way to the cross - and you feel the real meaning of that phrase in a place the human heart usually doesn't dare to go. You understand that we are called to that *same* level of obedience. With Jesus' *humanity* so irresistibly on display, you understand that we have no excuse. There is no place to hide.

The truth is this: Is it just a "movie"? In a way, yes. But it goes far beyond that, in a fashion I've never felt - in any forum. We may think we "know". We know *nothing*. We've gone 2,000 years - *used* to the idea of a pleasant story, and a sanitized Christ. We *expect* the ending, because we've heard it so many times. God *forgive* us. This film tears that all away. It's as close as any of us will ever get to knowing, until we fully know. Paul understood. "Be urgent, in and out of season."

Luke wrote that Jesus reveals Himself in the breaking of the bread. Exactly. *The Passion Of The Christ* shows that Bread being broken.

Go see this movie.

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