



## **Experiencing the Passion of Christ**

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### **Introduction:**

At the end of 2002 there were 3,557 people in America who sat on death row. There are 38 states and our federal government who have capital statutes. All those who sit on death row, had committed murder. They have been tried, found guilty with evidence that supports that beyond any reasonable doubt and they are awaiting execution. Whenever someone is tried, found guilty and executed there is a good reason for that sentence being carried out.

It is logical when people see the movie, *The Passion of the Christ* that questions come to mind as to why Jesus was crucified? What had He done to deserve such treatment? Who was responsible for his death?

Walk with me through the facts that surround Jesus' life and ministry. He healed, he raised people from death, he delivered people from demonic possession, He fed hungry people, great miracles took place through his ministry, but there is not a shred of evidence that He did any thing that would have condemned Him to death. He never killed anyone, He never committed adultery, He never stole, and He never lied. In fact, Scripture tells us that Jesus was without sin. He had to be sinless or else His death would have had no effect on taking away our sin. He was the perfect Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

I was talking to someone the other day about the movie and Jesus' death, and this person said, well we have to remember that thousands of people died by crucifixion. That is so true, but the difference is that many of those individuals died for their crimes, where as Christ didn't die for *His* sin, he died for the sins of others.

**So who was responsible for putting Jesus to death?** Obviously if He was not guilty of any crime, so those who were responsible, committed murder. When something happens that we don't agree with or think is right, we often look for answers and someone to blame.

I have done that and you have too. At times I have misplaced my keys at home, and I don't always look in the right place, or thoroughly enough to find them. I suspect someone has moved them and I'm ready to point a finger to my wife or sons to blame them. Of course, there are times people borrow something of mine and don't put it back, but then more often than not, no one has touched them. I find them right where I put them, and that is usually the last place I look.

So it is our tendency to want to point a finger, and to look for someone to blame for what happened to Jesus. There certainly were people who were instrumental in giving assent to the crucifixion of Christ - Pilate, Ciaphas, some of the religious leaders of the day who were probably upset by Jesus' teachings and ways. Think of it; Jesus could have resisted. He could have aroused the Jewish people and as the Son of God, He could have led a revolt that would have ended in stomping out Roman rule. But He didn't.

In fact John 19:10-11 records Jesus in front of Pilate being questioned.

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, **“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”**

Jesus was not a victim. There were many times before He was arrested, tried and crucified that He told His disciples He would go to Jerusalem and suffer many things there and He would die for the sin of the world.

There were several people who were involved with helping Jesus get to the cross. There were members of the Pharisees, Sadducees and chief priests who regarded Jesus as dangerous and charged Him with blasphemy because He claimed that He was the Son of God.

Pilate, a Gentile, signed the death order even though he said, “I find no fault in Christ.” There was no evidence that Pilate could find to condemn Him and put Him to death.

Gentile soldiers from the Roman Empire treated Christ like a criminal. Not only did they torture Jesus through whipping Him, but they mocked Him with words of scorn, bruised Him with fists, spat on Him, pressed a crown of thorns on His head, and led Him through the streets like a public enemy.

Each of us had a part in the death of Christ as well. Dr Peter Marshall wrote this – *“When we are honest with ourselves, we know that we were there too and that we helped to put Christ there. Every human being was represented at Calvary, every sin was in a nail, or the spear, or the needle-like thorns, and pardon for them all was in the blood that was shed.”*

So there you have it. It was God's plan that Jesus die, and God the Father had to look away while He died and took our sin. But in another respect, Jesus laid down His own life; it was not taken from Him. If we want someone to blame for Jesus' death, we have to look at ourselves.

If you're a seeker and you are looking for a portrait of what God is like, read the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Through Jesus' life we see a beautiful picture of God that is loving, forgiving, accepting, wonderfully magnetic, charismatic and brilliant. Yet Jesus' teachings confronted the way the Scriptures had been interpreted up to that time. At every turn He was challenging religious leaders with their wrong thinking and their wrong acting. He clearly told them that they should live their lives by the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. It's through His life and it's through His death and resurrection and our ongoing search for Jesus that we find Him to be a man of passion.

I want to talk to you this morning about this man named Jesus to point you to the passion of Jesus Christ. We need to not only see the passion of his death in the last few moments that he lived, but the passion and the zeal and the desire that He demonstrated. If we want to find inspiration to live the Christian life, we'll find much of it in the first four books of the New Testament. Those are called the Gospels and basically they recount the story of Jesus' life. The Gospel of Mark is where we are going to spend some time this morning, so if you have your Bible, please turn with me to the first chapter of Mark.

We will look at three of the great passions that were obvious from Jesus' life and the Gospels. I believe that in looking at these passions of Christ's life, we will see an example of the way we should live our lives.

We are called to follow Christ. Those who follow Him are promised life, freedom, and deliverance from the things that trap us and cause us to stumble.

## I. JESUS HAD A PASSION FOR GOD

Jesus' utmost passion was a zeal for God. If you look back in Mark 1 you will note that Jesus begins His ministry in His hometown of Capernaum. He had been healing people, casting out demons, teaching in the synagogue, and His popularity had grown to a level of celebrity. I am not sure that Jesus was comfortable with that and He didn't want news to spread about Him as quickly as it did.

Galilee was a large region. Because of the miracles and healings, everyone knew who He was. He had no time for himself and yet in the middle of all this busyness, he got up, left the house and went to a solitary place to pray.

**Mark 1:35** - Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Why does Jesus disconnect Himself from not only His most intimate followers but also from those who knew Him? Why does He go off to a solitary place to pray? He does that because He knows that He needs the strength to do the things that He's been called by His Father to do. Jesus teaches us very, very simply, that we don't have our own bottomless reservoir of love, wisdom and power to draw from.

**A life that is passionate about God expresses that passion in prayer.** Jesus models for us that in the busy times of our lives, our ministry, we need to withdraw, get quiet, get alone with God in prayer, and interact with the Heavenly Father. He just wants to be alone with God. One of the ways to interact with God and be alone with Him is through prayer.

Sometimes in prayer we may feel like there is not a whole lot happening. There have been times in my prayer life that I feel dry, or it seems dark. If you have ever had that same experience, let me assure you that God who stands right next to you is hearing your prayers. God always hears your prayer.

If you don't know yourself as the beloved child of God and you don't feel loved by God, then begin by spending time speaking with him in the quietness of prayer. The Bible tells us that God loves us with a love that is boundless and almost inexpressible and unimaginable, but until we encounter God through prayer, we'll never fully experience that.

Jesus showed us that a passion for God was woven into the very fabric of His existence. And I want that passion for God to overflow into my life, so I seek Jesus Christ through the pages of Scripture and I seek my Father through prayer. And I hope you'll do the same.

## II. JESUS HAD A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

*He interacts with the wrong people.* Next to His zeal and passion for God was His passion for people. Jesus often interacted with people who were looked down on. He spent time with the weak, those who were sick, the unclean, the sinners and those who people despised such as tax collectors.

**Mark 2:14-15** - As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. **"Follow me,"** Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

Here Jesus calls Levi son of Alphaeus, who was a tax collector to follow him. So Levi gets up from his job and follows Jesus to Levi's house where there were many tax collectors present who did not obey Old Testament law. They ate with Jesus and His disciples. When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw this they were curious and wondered why Jesus was not eating dinner with them.

You have to understand that the Pharisees thought, they were the most spiritual; the most righteous; the ones who most perfectly conformed to the law. On hearing this, Jesus says to them, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." It is recorded in the Gospel of Luke at least 17 times that Jesus was eating and drinking with the wrong crowd. At one point the Pharisees accuse Him of being a drunkard and a glutton because He is eating and drinking so often with the people that they absolutely despised and scorned and cast off. These are the people with whom Jesus interacts.

*He heals on the wrong day.* Why are you healing on the Sabbath? They considered healing to be "work" and they considered work on the Sabbath to be basically forsaking the law of God.

*He speaks in the wrong way.* Jesus brings about an entirely new interpretation of the Old Testament and He tells the religious leaders, “You’re so concerned by the letter of the law that you’re tying huge burdens onto people’s backs and then you’re doing nothing to help them carry it along.” Jesus said, “It’s not the letter of the law that my Father is concerned with; it’s the spirit of the law.” Jesus tells them they are just loading people down with enormous burdens that they were not intended to carry.

*He was attentive.* He wants to be with those who are broken, those who are forgotten. He’s accepting. What other religious leader of Jesus’ day, before or after, was so accepting of those who are considered to be the scum of the earth, the sinners and the tax collectors?

*He gave affirmation.* He gave affirmation again and again to people who came to Him for healing. “Your faith has healed you.”

*He wanted to prepare them for what was to happen.* He knew he would suffer and would be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. He knew that He must be killed and after 3 days rise again.

**Mark 8:31-33** - He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. **“Get behind me, Satan!”** he said. **“You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”**

Peter took Jesus aside and said surely the Messiah isn’t going to have to suffer a violent death and Peter began to rebuke Jesus. Jesus recognizes that Peter here is nothing more than the mouthpiece of Satan. He says to Peter I’m going to have to hold you accountable for those words

And He always holds people accountable, but He never seems to be a condemning, pious, legalistic judge. He’s always extending grace, forgiveness, and acceptance. He’s listening to people as they talk.

### **Conclusion:**

To embrace the lifestyle that Jesus proposes, in and of itself is a difficult thing to do. I believe **that to follow Jesus takes a lifetime. It is not something that we do overnight, but it is a daily slow process.** Following Jesus can be

He’s engaging them in the ordinary things of their daily lives. And He does the exact same thing with us.

We come to the conclusion when we read the Gospels that Jesus wants to spend time with us. He endures the cross and despises the shame of it because of the joy set before Him. The joy that He looks forward to is the joy of interacting intimately with you. It’s the joy of being restored to the relationship He first had with His Father. It’s this joy of bringing people into God’s presence.

### **III. JESUS HAD A PASSION FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The third passion that seemed to mark Jesus’ life is a passion for the kingdom. He introduces us to this word for the first time very early on in Mark’s Gospel, when He says that the kingdom of God is near. Those listening to him are told to be a part of the kingdom; they have to repent because the kingdom of God is close.

Jesus has this great overwhelming passion for the kingdom. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will be taken care of.” You’re worried about your homes. You’re worried about if you’re going to have a roof over your head or clothes on your back or food to eat. You don’t need to worry about those things. (Matthew 6:33)

Jesus speaks of the underlying principle of how the kingdom works and how it will be seen in **John 13:34-35.**

**“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

He goes on to say that the entire world will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. This love that Jesus speaks of is the greatest commodity in the kingdom of God, and it was manifested in the way Jesus allowed Himself to be treated and surrendered His life to death on the cross for sin.

painful because at times we have to let go of parts of our life that make Christ uncomfortable. The passion Jesus expressed through His life and death has had a profound impact on society. Likewise the passion we express for God, for others, and for the kingdom also has a tremendous impact on society. The bottom line is that we are called to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of the people we know and love. That's what Jesus did and what he calls us to do also.