

# The Crucifixion – Why the Violence?



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For those of us who have seen "The Passion," I don't think we will ever think of the crucifixion of Christ in quite the same way. If nothing else, the movie gave us a credible visualization of what really happened. Quite honestly, we need to come to grips with the brutality of the cross. We needed to see what happened to Jesus.

Apart from what people think about the technical aspects of the movie such as acting, screenplay, directing, and so forth, two major criticisms have been the extent of the violence and the charge of anti-Semitism. The Scriptures are clear about the kind of violence Jesus endured and who was humanly responsible for the actual death of Jesus. I am going to lay the film aside today and go into the Scriptures concerning Christ's agony. I will not deal with who was responsible for the crucifixion.

No matter how you come at the Gospels, the death that Jesus died was nothing short of torture. I am fully confident we are dealing in the Scriptures with the honest reports of what actually happened to Jesus, not some kind of myth or exaggeration of facts. I went through the accounts of the passion of Christ this week and mapped out the sequence of events that led to His crucifixion. I want to walk you through it.

## THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS

### A Passion Chronology

The last 18 hours of Christ's earthly, physical life were incredibly brutal. Jesus also suffered immense emotional and spiritual pain. But this is a chronology of His physical suffering in that His bodily sacrifice satisfied God and the Law for mankind's redemption

#### Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Thursday evening)

- ÿ Jesus agonizes in sweat and blood (Luke 22:44) *Christ's inner turmoil took on physical proportions.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers seize and bind Jesus (Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:46; John 18:12). *This was not a handshake. Jesus was jerked around.*

#### Jesus before Annas (late Thursday evening)

- ÿ A Roman soldier strikes Jesus (John 18:22) *This is a blow that inflicted significant pain.*
- ÿ Jesus is bound for transporting (John 18:24). *Probable discomfort and pain associated with this.*

**Jesus before Caiaphas** (Friday before sun-up)

- ÿ People spit in Christ's face (Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65)  
*Although not painful, this is not pleasant.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers and/or Sanhedrin members beat Jesus with fists (Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63)  
*Repeated blows with closed fists that inflicted significant pain.*
- ÿ Jesus is blindfolded (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64) *Jesus was most likely handled roughly and the tightened blindfold inflicted pain over bruised flesh.*
- ÿ Others slap Jesus (Matthew 26:67)  
*These are repeated stinging blows with open palm.*
- ÿ Jesus is bound for transporting (Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1)

**Jesus before Herod** (early Friday morning)

- ÿ Roman soldiers treat Jesus with contempt (Luke 23:11)  
*No physical pain is explicitly mentioned here, but the general treatment by the Roman soldiers would indicate that the contempt consisted of mocking and hitting Him.*

**Jesus before Pilate** (early Friday morning)

- ÿ Jesus is scourged (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1; Isaiah 50:6) *This is the only recorded scourging of*

*Jesus in the Gospel accounts. I suspect it was the only scourging.*

*There is no way Jesus could have survived more than one. But this was seen in the Old Testament and by Christ's prophetic words to be a significant piece of His ordeal (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 20:19; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33).*

*This was the greatest torture other than the cross that Jesus endured. In scourging, the victim was stripped and his hands tied to a ring on a post above his head.*

*The whip consisted of a handle to which several leather cords were attached. Near the end of the cords were small pieces of metal, rock, and bone fragments. The whipping would pound the shoulders, back, and legs inflicting deep, long painful bruises and cuts causing intense pain. As the whipping continued, the flesh from the back would hang in long bleeding ribbons, often exposing some ribs. The soldiers were trained to prolong the agony but stop short of death.*

**Jesus in the Roman Barracks**

(early Friday morning)

- ÿ Jesus is stripped (Matthew 27:28)  
*If you ever had any clothes or bandage adhere to a wound, you know how painful it is to strip it off.*
- ÿ A purple robe is put on Jesus (Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:17; John 19:2) *Putting something on*

*open wounds would be very painful.*

- ÿ Roman soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2) *How does a splinter feel? Imagine several dozen jammed into your scalp? Remember, wounded heads bleed profusely.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers spit on Jesus (Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:19)
- ÿ Roman soldiers beat Jesus on the head with a staff (reed) (Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:19) *Now they take a cane-like instrument and repeatedly crack Jesus on the head with it, thorns and all.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers strike blows to Christ's face (John 19:3) *There are more repeated blows to Christ's face with closed fists. Did you ever see a fighter's face after taking some hard punches. There was no referee to stop this. You must believe me that by this time, Jesus was unrecognizable.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers take off the robe and put Christ's clothes back on (Matthew 27:31; Mark 15:20) *Once again, the matter of clothes sticking to wounded flesh.*
- ÿ Roman soldiers lead Jesus away to get His cross (Matthew 27:31)

*After all of this, do you think they hauled Jesus away gently? Do you think they cared if the weight and contact of the cross on His flayed body hurt Him?*

### **Jesus on the Road to Golgotha**

(early Friday morning)

- ÿ Jesus carries His cross (John 19:17) *After all of this, Jesus is forced to start walking with a heavy, rough-sawn cross that dug into His lacerations . I'm sure He staggered and fell, causing more pain. Jesus got to the place where He could not continue and the soldiers pressed Simon of Cyrene to carry it while Jesus walked in front.*

### **Jesus on the Cross** (Friday 9:00am to 3:00pm)

- ÿ Christ's hands and feet are nailed to the cross (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18; Luke 24:40; John 20:25, 27) *Now Jesus is lying on His back to the incredible pain of shredded flesh. The soldiers drive large spikes into His hands and feet. Extreme, searing, excruciating pain shoot through his hands and fingers and up the arms to His back and head. Corresponding pain radiates up His legs from His feet. That alone would have been bad enough. When they lift the cross, Jesus feels unspeakable pain at the jolt of the cross falling into position. He feels every movement the cross makes in the wind.*
- ÿ Jesus is extremely thirsty (John 19:28; Psalm 69:21) *This whole, long ordeal drained Christ's body of most of it's vital fluids. He was dehydrated, needing water.*
- ÿ Jesus is pierced in the side with a spear after death (John 19:34; 20:27)

From Isaiah 50:6, we know that Christ's captors plucked His beard. We must also conclude that the successive nighttime trials robbed Jesus of all sleep. And the Gospels do not address the terrible physical conditions of crucifixion that include eventual suffocation or heart failure. Nor did they likely record every instance of brutality beforehand. None can imagine the grueling pain of hanging from spikes on a cross for six hours (Mark 15:25, 33). By the time it was all over, Isaiah says that what happened to Christ was equivalent to being crushed (Isaiah 53:5, 10).

Can any of us ever regard the passion of Christ lightly again? Jesus took the punishment that was meant for us and by His scourging we are healed (Isaiah 53:5; I Peter 2:24).

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The passion of Christ was very violent. There is no way to soften it except to ignore it or to sanitize it through religious veneer. The question keeps coming about the violence. Was this much violence necessary for the redemption of the world?

Before I attempt to answer the question, I want to put four backdrops behind the question.

1. The passion of Christ was voluntary. He didn't have to do it. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made an agreement in heaven in eternity past, but in the hour of agony, He could have opted out. In John 10:18, Jesus said, "No one has taken My life away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again."

Jesus could have said no to all of this.

2. Christ was searching for another way at the last minute. Jesus knew it would be extremely painful. He didn't want to suffer if He didn't have to. It got to the point where He pleaded for another way in the Garden (Matthew 26:39). He knew what was coming.

Last November I came down with a sore big toe. It wouldn't heal. I tried every remedy I could to avoid going to the doctor for fear of the pain for him just to touch it. Four months later, I ended up in his office on the opening day of "The Passion." As I lay on the table waiting for the painful treatment, I was overcome with the magnitude of what Jesus had to face and I felt embarrassed.

3. Jesus could have stopped the suffering at any point along the way. Peter tried to stop it early with a sword. But Jesus told him to put it away and that He could appeal to His Father and He would at once send more than 12 legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). Jesus could have said, "This is enough. No more," and walked away.
4. The suffering of Christ was for a race that didn't love Him. Have any of you ever knowingly been ignored or hurt by someone else? How did you feel and what did you want to do? Here are some responses. It would be hard to endure pain for someone who loved you. But how far would you go for those who hated you so much they wanted to kill you? Romans 5:8 tells us that Jesus died for us while we were yet enemies. None of us would have done what Jesus did.

So why all the violence in the passion of Christ? Wouldn't a little blood have been enough? Why couldn't there be a little suffering with a quick death? Why all the brutality? I remember talking to several of our people who were stricken with cancer. They knew they were going to die in several months. They made a common statement to me: "It's not that I'm afraid to die. It's just not knowing how bad it's going to get and what it's going to be like until death comes."

I have wrestled deeply with the extent of Christ's sufferings and I'm going to share with you why I believe all the violence leading to Christ's death in the Gospels was necessary. I must confess to you that I still don't understand it all. But this is why I believe Jesus suffered to the extent that He did.

1. What happened to Jesus was the will of God. There are some things we do not understand that we need to accept by faith until the fuller revelation in heaven. Praise God, I don't have to understand truth to teach it! Isaiah 53 paints a vivid picture of the sufferings of Christ 700 years before it happened. Every blow, every stripe, every piercing was known by God. Verse 10 goes so far as to say that the Lord was pleased to crush Him. Jesus Himself made several references as He was heading for the cross that the sufferings He was to endure were the fulfillments of Scripture (Matthew 26:24, 54).

In the preaching of the apostles in Acts 2, Peter says that Jesus was delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, nailed to a cross, and put to death (vs. 23). We learn in Acts 4:25-28 that Herod, Pilate, Jews, and Gentiles gathered together in Jerusalem against Jesus—quote—

"to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."

There is no question that the violent suffering that Jesus endured was the will of God.

2. Jesus allowed the course of events to happen without tampering with the free will of man. In the prophetic words of Jesus in Isaiah 50:6, He says, "I gave My back to those who strike me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting." Jesus gave Himself to the frenzied mob. The Pharisees had been murderously angry at Jesus for three years. The Roman soldiers enjoyed scourging and beating up criminals and putting them on crosses as sport. They had no emotions of compassion.

The people who hurt Jesus made nasty choices that Jesus allowed. Jesus chose not to exercise His authority to take a shortcut. He surrendered Himself fully to ruthless hands and did not interfere once with what they did.

3. The sufferings of Jesus put the stamp of perfection on Him. Hebrews 2:10 makes a powerful statement: "For it was fitting for Him...in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." Jesus was the perfect and spotless Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Anything less than perfection would have spoiled the sacrifice. Jesus was already perfect. The sufferings did not bring that to pass.

But all that Jesus suffered validated the perfect nature of His sacrifice. At no time throughout the whole ordeal did Jesus sin in word, deed, or thought. And throughout the long

process, it was said multiple times by Pilate, "I find no guilt in Him." The extent of Christ's sufferings demonstrated that He was the perfect sacrifice. He indisputably passed the grueling test.

4. Because of His sufferings, Jesus is able to come to the aid of anyone who suffers. A lot of people have suffered incredibly in this world. Jesus went through the worst and most intensely painful torture ever devised by man. That qualified Him to understand our pain and come to our aid. Hebrews 2:18 (cf. Heb. 4:15-16) says that since Jesus was tested in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tested. Jesus understands the worst pain and agony that we might be going through. He went through it Himself. To shortcut that process would have made Him unable to understand our sufferings. Because He has suffered as deeply as anyone ever did, He can identify with us to the maximum and help us.
5. **Jesus showed us that we too can take a lot and come out on top.** What is our natural response to pain? Get away from it, no matter what! But Jesus takes a different view of pain and suffering. Yes, get away from any pain you can. But if we must undergo pain because of unjust dealings, we must follow His example and do what Jesus did. He showed us that it is possible to endure extreme pain and come through victoriously (I Pet 2:19-21). Jesus is straight with us. Be redemptive with people. Be willing to suffer when you are right rather than bail from the process.
6. **The extent of Christ's sufferings demonstrated both the scope and the depth of sin in the world.** Jesus was taking the sin of the

whole world for all time on Himself. Not just that, the extent of sin in each of us is so deep that it stays in us for a lifetime. In Romans 7, Paul bemoans how sin wants to take control even when we wish it otherwise. The truth is, sin is extremely hard to deal with. Christ's passion was a demonstration that sin does not go easily. It is a fierce struggle. The sufferings of Jesus were in every sense a depiction of the true nature of the battle to conquer the scope and grip of sin.

7. **The passion of Jesus was an undeniable demonstration of infinite love.** One of the things that Jesus is showing us in His sufferings is the extent that love will go. When we see the stripes and feel the blows, we are to marvel that love would go to this extent. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13). Friends, Paul says in Romans 5 that each of us were **yet sinners and enemies** of God, Jesus died for us (vss. 8, 10). What's more, the passion of Christ showed an equal and surpassing amount of love to the hate displayed by those who tortured and killed Him. You can't look at the brutal sufferings of Jesus and not see incredible love!
8. **In His sufferings, Jesus showed us the abuse He is willing to endure to reach us.** Jesus made an incredible statement in one of His teachings, "Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also (Mt. 5:39)." Jesus knew He was going to have to demonstrate that one day. The world is evil and cruel. It hated Jesus. It persecuted Him. It still does. The world is under the domination of Satan and darkness. People do not come easily to Jesus.

And many are flat out opposed to Him. Yet it's the heart of God that none should perish but that all come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). Jesus showed us that He was willing to go to incredible lengths to redeem people, even the greatest of sinners.

9. **The extent of Christ's suffering determined the extent of our healing.** I am captivated by this. All of us have been wounded deeply by sin, Satan, and others. All of us are in bad shape and some of us don't know it. Isaiah 53:5 and I Peter 2:24 tell us that we are healed by His scourging, **the ripping wounds inflicted on His flesh.** This is an obvious reference to our spiritual healing. We get a healing from sin that saves us.

But salvation does not heal all the wounds of the soul, spirit, and mind. Salvation is just the beginning. Most of the healing that comes to us spiritually and emotionally happens **after salvation** as we walk with Jesus. **A few stripes meant a little healing. Many stripes mean abundant healing.** Jesus knew how much healing we all needed. He took a lot of blows so that we could have a lot of healing. We better be praising God for this!

10. **Knowing how much Christ suffered should make us hate sin all the more.** We need to ask ourselves, "What was at the root of all the suffering that Jesus endured?" **The only explanation is sin.** Pride, hate, lust, and sinful deeds flowed through human beings to inflict this pain. **Sin tortured Jesus.** Paul tells us in **Romans 6** that we have been united with Christ in His death. Our old self was crucified with Him that we should no longer be slaves to sin (vss.1-12). We are to identify with the sufferings

of Jesus and realize that sin caused His pain. We should be so mad about what sin did to Christ that we should declare war against its lusts (vs. 12). To realize what sin did to Christ and to venture into sin is to wound Jesus ourselves.

Sin does not often show us what it really does to us. Hollywood presents the face of pleasure and fun. But the Bible tells us that the mind set on the flesh is death and that the wages of sin is death. Jesus was the gruesome illustration of what sin **actually** does. It kills and destroys. When we see sin for what it really is and does, we will hate it!

## Conclusion

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The violence of the passion of Christ cannot be minimized. He was brutally tortured. In many ways, the movie brings to life the truth. And we can't handle it. **Why was the journey of Christ so violent?** When all is said and done, in the minds of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **there was no other way to redeem the souls of the lost human race apart from the cruel Calvary road.**

Isn't it amazing that people still try to create other ways? **The most popular way in the world is to bypass the cross and try to work your way to heaven by good deeds.** The thought is that certainly our good works will have merit, and if we try hard enough the good will outweigh the bad and God will say you're okay to enter heaven. The problem with that is the Bible says that if we have sinned in **one part** of the Law, we are **guilty of all** (Jas. 2:10). And we are told that when God looks at our good deeds, He regards them as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

**There was no other way** for God to redeem us than the passion of Christ. There is **nothing we can** do to redeem ourselves. Yet Jesus loved us so much in our filthy rags that He paid the ultimate price. Jesus went **the complete distance** in His sufferings for us. **The only choice Jesus had if He was going to rescue us was to walk the road of horrendous agony.** The violence that befell Jesus is ugly and heart-rending. But all of it was necessary. I praise God that Jesus did it. Just think how bad things would be if He hadn't!

## Scripture References

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