

## The Passion, More Than a Movie

Rarely have I heard such a buzz about a movie as I have over, *The Passion of the Christ* produced by Mel Gibson. Last week I made a re-acquaintance with a dear man to whom I witnessed six years ago. After we said a few niceties, he soon wanted to know my opinion about the movie. Well, I have not seen the movie, so I cannot tell from personal experience how I feel about it exactly. I can tell you what others have who saw the movie.

Noted movie critic and radio host Michael Medved has called *The Passion of the Christ* "by far the most moving, substantive and artistically successful adaptation of biblical material ever attempted by Hollywood."

Peggy Noonan, a gifted journalist and former speech writer for Presidents Reagan and Bush (41) had a comment, "I came away reassured. It is a moving film, and what it moves you to is tears, and thought ... It leaves you indicting yourself: It leaves you wondering about what your part in that agonizing drama would have been back then, and what your part is today."

Billy Graham, who described himself as having been "moved to tears" by the film said, "After watching *The Passion of the Christ*, I feel as if I have actually been there ... The film is faithful to the Bible's teaching that we are all responsible for Jesus' death, because we have all sinned."

In an open letter, Dr. James Dobson founder of Focus On The Family said, "I had the privilege of viewing a 'rough cut' of the movie last summer during a writing trip to California, and again in September. I can say that, in addition to being faithful to the essentials of the biblical account, it is easily the most heart-wrenching, powerful portrayal of Christ's suffering that I have ever seen. Shirley and I were deeply moved by the stark depiction of the brutality and humiliation that Jesus endured on our behalf. Other preview screenings have had a similar effect, leaving audience members either weeping openly or hushed in reverent silence."

My wife has never been inside a cinema theatre and the last movie I went to see was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. I went just before I surrendered to preach the winter of 1970. We always told our kids that if it is appropriate, we can always wait for it to come out on video. In all honesty, I have an immense curiosity about this film. Could it be that for once in the history of cinema, there may be a film that points to Christ as the way of salvation? The question makes me title this article, "The Passion, More Than a Movie."

Please allow me some disclaimers. As I said earlier I have not seen it. Mel Gibson has made movies that we would not want our children to see. He is not a Baptist; his understanding of the gospel from the viewpoint in which he was reared is very different from the fundamental, evangelical viewpoint that we preach and believe. Unless the whole world has told a lie, and that would include some Christians of honest notoriety, Mr. Gibson has studied the Gospels and writings about the death of Christ and attempted to show what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John told us.

Listen to these words of Mel Gibson, "I'm not a preacher and I'm not a pastor," Gibson said. "But I really feel my career was leading me to make this. The Holy Ghost was working through me on this film, and I was just directing traffic. I hope the film has the power to evangelize." Those are pretty strong words. In more than one article and interview I have either read or heard, Gibson talks about a life-changing time twelve or thirteen years ago when he came to the end of himself and turned to the Gospels for an answer. Again, I know I'm handling dynamite. I can only imagine what some of my brethren who are reading this may be thinking: Yeah, Pope has gone soft on Hollywood. Let me say I have not. Hollywood still has the potential of making films that are not only immoral, but also sacrilegious.

The point that I am trying to make is something has happened here. It appears that someone has

dared put on the screen, not a watered-down version, but a true to the Gospels version of the death of Christ on the cross. Whether I am saying it from the pulpit of Christchurch or someone is reading it out loud on the edge of the Grand Canyon or whispering it in the ear of their child in a dimly lit bedroom at bedtime, there is power in that Gospel. There can be no denying that, there can be no erasing that from your reality. Paul said, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" (I Corinthians 1:18). This is why he went on to say, "*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (I Corinthians 1:2).

Here is the flip side; on Fox News Channel's "The O'Reilly Factor," Gibson said a reporter was dispatched by a "reputable" but unnamed publication to "dig up dirt" on him. "Whenever you take up a subject like this it does bring out a lot of enemies," he said. His private life, his banking records, charities he supports, friends, business associates and family members have all undergone scrutiny in this investigation."

Columnist James Carroll of the Boston Globe, a subsidiary of The New York Times, went so far as to suggest that "Even a faithful repetition of the Gospel stories of the death of Jesus can do damage exactly because those sacred texts themselves carry the virus of Jew hatred." By the way, Dobson in a comment on Mr. Carroll's statement said, "Does Mr. Carroll really expect readers to believe that the Gospels - written by Jews about a Jewish Messiah and His Jewish disciples - are anti-Semitic? His assertion is so ridiculous and foolish as to be laughable."

Finally, Gibson said he has found himself caught up in a huge conflict between "big realms that are warring and battling. You stick your head up and you get knocked," he said. "I didn't realize it would be so vicious. The acts against this film started early. There is vehement anti-Christian sentiment out there and they don't want it." "It was a strange mixture of the most difficult thing I've ever done, along with this incredible ease," Gibson said. "Everyone who worked on this movie was changed. There were agnostics and Muslims on set converting to Christianity."

So what has Mr. Gibson discovered? Perhaps the actor bit off more than he realized when he decided to put the gospel on a screen, for the Scripture plainly says, "*And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased*" (Galatians 5:11).

You see, the Passion, the true suffering of our Savior has been and always shall be much more than a movie. It is the power, the very power of God unto salvation! It shows a person he or she is lost, in need of a Savior and if we believe He did that for us, repent and accept that death, burial, and resurrection, we are saved forever! Ah, could it be that the Devil has been dealt a blow by one of His own ploys? The verdict is still out. I suppose we shall see. I personally am praying that the gospel of Jesus is presented and if not in its true form, it will drive many to examine the Gospels for themselves and come to the wonderful discovery of its never dying power.

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16).

- Pastor Pope -

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