



The Passion of Christ

- Joni Eareckson Tada

It was Ash Wednesday when I entered the movie theatre a little breathless. I didn't head to the candy counter to load up on popcorn and a bag of Smarties. We went straight to our seats and waited quietly as others filed in. When the theatre was full, the movie began.

From the moment *The Passion of the Christ* filled the screen until the last scene, I sat riveted. Others told me to expect a lot of violence, so I was braced for the worse. I flinched as the soldiers ripped the cat-o-nine-tails across the back of Jesus... I grimaced with each slap and kick... and I found myself pleading with the women on the side of the road to Calvary, "Someone stop this! Stop this!" But there was absolutely no way I could understand the worst part of Christ's suffering – that dreadful, terrible time when Jesus felt the crushing horror of separation from His Father.

When the movie suddenly ended – and I wish Mel Gibson had devoted more than 12 short seconds to the Resurrection – I realized I had been sitting tense and motionless for the last 120 minutes. Only when the screen went blank was I able to breathe. Only then did tears flow. And I found myself whispering, "Thank you, Jesus, thank you. Bless you for the price you paid for my salvation."

I'm glad I saw *The Passion of the Christ* as the season of Lent began. It gave me a fresh picture of the bruising humiliation of the cross... it prompted a deeper sense of gratitude later that week when I took Communion... and most of all, the movie became a chisel in God's hand to further chip away "*the sin which so easily entangles*" (Hebrews 12:1).

Here in the United States, the movie generated much discussion about who nailed Jesus to the cross. "Did the religious leaders kill Jesus?! Did the Romans? Was it *our* fault? Are we *all* responsible for the death of God's Son? Did our sins nail Him to the tree?"

The fact is *God* did it. God is ultimately responsible. Isaiah 53:10 tells us, "*Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...*" The Father in heaven came up with the plan which included the cross. And because of Jesus' great love for His Father, as well as His love for us, the Son obediently followed through on God's plan. "*...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*" (Isaiah 53:6).

But what about the cruel Roman soldiers and the mob who clamored for Christ's crucifixion? Acts 4:27-29 tells us, "*Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what [God's] power and will had decided*

beforehand should happen.” Herod, Pilate and those cruel soldiers – us included – are morally responsible for our part in it all, but overarching it all is God.

Amazing. Astounding. When Resurrection Sunday dawns this year, my praise and thanksgiving, my adoration and gratitude to Jesus – as well as to my Father in heaven – will be all the more glorious. Yes, the devil may have instigated the treachery, inspiring those drunken soldiers in their evil plans, but in so doing, he slit his own throat – because ultimately it was God who “steered” the dreadful events to serve His own ends and purposes; that is our great salvation, so rich, full and free! And thus, the world’s worst murder became the world’s only salvation. Sound incredible? Welcome to the hard and fast reality behind Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

I can’t explain it. I’ll never understand the depth of God’s wisdom, knowledge and love. Amazing love, how can it be?! That God should plunge the knife in His own chest for me. That God should conquer death by embracing it. No wonder the Good News is so *great!* Thank you, Jesus, for loving and obeying the Father. May my life forever be a thank-offering as I love and obey you all the more!

“The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him”
(Mark 15:16-19).