

# **Commentary by Brett Younger: Questions about "The Passion" \_30804**

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## **COMMENTARY: Questions about "The Passion"**

**By Brett Younger**

When I was much younger (and I have apologized to God for this) I participated in my church's Evangelism Explosion program.

In this outreach method, the witnesser wore an unattractive gold lapel pin consisting of two question marks. When the victim asked, "Why are you wearing two questions marks?" we answered, "There are two questions I'd like to ask you. 'If you died tonight, where would you spend eternity?' and 'Why should God let you into heaven?'" I learned that beginning a conversation with "If you died tonight" seldom leads to a helpful exchange of ideas.

For the last week and a half, people who would never dream of wearing two question marks have been asking a question that can lead to a helpful exchange of ideas. The question is, "Have you seen the movie?" How should we talk about "The Passion of the Christ"? What's thoughtful? What's beneficial? Several questions keep showing up.

**Is the movie anti-Semitic?**

Christians may not be the best group to decide what's anti-Semitic. Those who called themselves Christians were partially responsible for the Holocaust as well as other violence against Jews. As a Baptist living in Fort Worth, the movie doesn't seem likely to provoke anti-Semitic acts to me, but Jewish people around the world have a right to be concerned.

- ◆ **How is the movie different from the biblical accounts?**

In each gospel, the story from the arrest of Jesus to his death takes about three or four pages. This movie has an 85-page script that focuses on the physical suffering of Jesus. In Matthew, the scourging, which takes 10 painfully long minutes in the film, is only a phrase. The walk to Golgotha, which feels like forever, is two verses. At Broadway Baptist Church's screening, a little more than half of those in attendance indicated that the graphic violence got in the way of considering the whole story.

- ◆ **Is this a good movie for non-Christians to see?**

The panel at our discussion said they wished that the movie set Jesus' death within the context of Jesus' life. Some people will see this film and not understand that Jesus died because he was a revolutionary who told the rich to share with the poor, hypocrites to love sinners and powerful people that they had no real power.

- ◆ **Do all Christians share the same understanding of the cross?**

This movie seems to reflect the idea that God had to punish someone for sins and so Jesus took the beating we had coming. This theory, substitutionary atonement, is held by many devout conservative Christians. Another Christian understanding is that the cross teaches us that God suffers with us. The cross is not the revelation of God's anger, but of the price God is always paying for all the sin and sorrow in the world.

It's hard to discuss the things that matter most—for those who wear lapel

pins and those who don't. When an opportunity presents itself, we need to take advantage of it. Well-made movies that take Christian faith seriously don't show up very often. We should be eager to talk about Jesus' story, and do so with passion.

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