

# **LifeWay Family Bible Series for April 4: Christ's suffering was born out of his great love\_32204**

March 19, 2004

Posted: 3/19/04

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## **Christ's suffering was born out of his great love**

Matthew 27:27-31, 35-37, 50-51; 1 John 4:7-10

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Mel Gibson has everyone talking about his movie “The Passion of the Christ.” I have seen the movie. The book was better! Gibson showed us well the “how” of the crucifixion. The church must tell “the rest of the story.” The Bible lesson for today tells the story of the suffering of the Savior in Matthew 27:27-51. It gives us the meaning of his suffering in 1 John 4:7-10.

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

The word study for this lesson is “propitiation.” It is the King James Version word that the New American Standard text above translates as “atoning

sacrifice.”



Have you used the word “propitiation” lately? I didn't think so. The reason you have not used it is because it is a word heavy with Greek baggage from the first century. None of us is a first century Greek. Neither was John. He was a first century Jew who wrote in Greek so he might be understood by his larger culture. He may have gotten the word from the Greek language, but he took its meaning from his Jewish roots in the Old Testament. What does this word mean?

The word does not mean God was mad and had to be satisfied by someone or something so he could love humanity. The ancient Greeks believed their gods were capricious and had to be bought off at times by their human subjects. They were not much different than the folks among whom Abraham first lived in the land of promise—people who often practiced child sacrifice to appease their gods. Abraham would learn that his God would not require the death of Isaac to prove his devotion. God would himself provide a sacrifice. Ultimately, Jesus is the “Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). God loved us before he sent his Son into the world.

Propitiation then originates with God. He makes the first move to bring his straying creation back to himself. He sends Jesus to “show his love among us” (1 John 4:9) and to be the “atoning sacrifice (propitiation) for our sins” (1 John 4:10). This means he not only forgives us, he removes the offense that stands between us and God so we might have a relationship with him. When we focus only on forgiveness as the effect of the cross, we become selfish. God takes away our guilt and gives us eternal life.

But the idea is more than that. He does not just forgive so that we can be debt-free. He forgives so that we can be his. It is relationship he desires. His forgiveness removes the offense that is between us. We are not just forgiven. We are restored. It is not just a privilege, it also is a responsibility to live and act as God's restored people.

In January 1935, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia appeared in a night court that served the poorest ward of New York City. He dismissed the judge for the evening and took the bench himself. An old woman in ragged clothes came before the bench, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She had done so to feed her grandchildren after they had been deserted by their father. Her daughter was too sick to work.

The shopkeeper refused to drop the charges. The prosecutor said: "It's a bad neighborhood, your honor. She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson." La Guardia agreed. "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions-\$10 or 10 days in jail."

Even while pronouncing the sentence, his honor the mayor was reaching into his own pocket for a \$10 bill. He said: "Here is the \$10 fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in the courtroom 50 cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, the papers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered old lady who had stolen a loaf of bread. One dollar had been contributed by the shop keeper and the prosecuting attorney. All in the courtroom gave the mayor/judge a standing ovation. (Adapted from "The Ragamuffin Gospel," by Brennan Manning.)

"Propitiation" is not a word we use every day. It is not something we can do to get God to notice us or love us. It is what God did out of his love so that

we can be his children. His grace forgives us, restores us and empowers us to love others. For John in this epistle, we can love one another because he loved us first (1 John 4:7-8).

We can't explain it. Grace always is beyond explanation. All we can do is bow in his presence and offer our praise and gratitude. It's the ovation he deserves.

### **Questions for discussion**

- ◆ How would you begin to tell the rest of the story of "The Passion of the Christ"?
- ◆ The story is told of how Fiorello La Guardia stood up for a poor woman-how has Christ done the same in your life?

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