

'The Passion of The Christ' more than a movie_20904

February 13, 2004

Posted: 2/06/04

"The
Passion of
the Christ,"
a film by
Mel
Gibson,
vividly
portrays
the
crucifixion.
(c) 2003
Icon
Distribution
Inc.

'The Passion of The Christ' more than a movie

By George Henson

Staff Writer

DENTON—"The Passion of the Christ" will spark a stampede from theater seats to church pews, and Christians need to be ready to answer the

questions the movie raises, Steve Pate believes.

Pate, associate director of missions for Denton Baptist Association, predicts a pilgrimage to America's churches not unlike what happened after terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001.

**See related
Story:
[AMC theater
chain gives
tentative
approval to
"edgy" BGCT
ad](#)**

"People came to our churches in droves after 9/11, and they didn't get the answers to their questions, and they're not there now," Pate pointed out. "If we don't get them this time, we may not get another chance, because they are going to stop thinking of the church as a place where answers to life's hard questions can be found."

Pate urged pastors in his association to prepare for the film's Feb. 25 Ash Wednesday opening: "Whatever you've got planned for preaching, you'd better jettison that and answer the questions that people are going to be coming with."

Pate suggested pastors cover subjects such as the accuracy of the Bible, the humanity of Jesus, the necessity of Christ's painful death by crucifixion and evidence of the resurrection.

"This film brings up a lot more questions than it answers, but I don't see how anyone can see it and not think of it as a tool for evangelism. True, this is not the altar call, but it can be the start of a spiritual journey whereby

people turn their lives to faith in Jesus Christ," Pate said.

"It really does raise more questions than it answers, but they will know the death that Jesus went through was really brutal. It's up to the church to tell them the beatings and the death on the cross were for them," Pate said.

"The film shows what Jesus suffered, but there's no transference that this was for me. There's nothing in the film like that. The church has to do that."

Denton Association has contracted with the United Artists theater at Vista Ridge Mall in Lewisville for two early showings of the movie.

While the movie will not be shown there during its release on Feb. 25, the movie will be shown one time on both Feb. 23 and 24 in a 300-seat theater. Pate is certain that churches within the association will buy those 600 seats well before those dates arrive.

"As soon as the e-mail goes out to the churches, those seats are gone," he said.

This is simply an opportunity that can't be missed, Pate said. Outreach Inc. has called the film "perhaps the best outreach opportunity in 2,000 years."

In addition to changing sermon topics, Pate also has suggested churches in his association prepare special seeker Sunday school classes so visitors can ask questions rather than just sit through a standard lesson.

In short, he believes churches should depart from their regular routine in order to accommodate people who are drawn by the film.



Jesus, portrayed by Jim Caviezal, carries the cross in a scene from "The Passion of the Christ," a film by Mel Gibson. (c) 2003 New Icon Distribution Inc. A Newmarket Films Release.(Philippe Antonello Photo)

"I'm a huge planning person, but to quote (Henry) Blackaby, 'Our job is to see what God is doing in the world and to get on board.' It's obvious looking at newspapers, the Internet and television that this is something God is active in," Pate said.

"If churches deal with the questions these people who come are asking, there could be a huge harvest. If they don't, there will not be any."

Pate, who has seen the film, warns Christians not to see the film alone. Instead, he urges Christians to take non-Christian friends or family members with them.

"This movie is so hard to sit through that if someone says, 'I'll go and check it out, and then I'll take someone,' they won't go back," he said.

Pate said he would see the movie again, but he would do it only with a non-Christian and only because "evangelism is what makes my heart beat fast."

Pate also is cautioning youth ministers who take their youth groups to make sure all have signed permission slips in hand, because the film is rated R for the violence of the crucifixion. He also advised youth ministers to provide time for discussion after young people view the film.

“They are going to need to talk about what they have seen,” he said.

The film has affected him greatly, he acknowledged.

“To see this film is a life-changing event. I will never approach the cross the same way. See this film, and you will never approach the Lord's Supper the same way. You can't. It's impossible,” he said.

“But if you want it to be a life-transforming event, take a lost person to see it with you. Don't go without taking a lost person with you.”

While he believes the movie is a great opportunity for the church to show itself relevant to society, Pate is concerned about what will happen if churches fail to take advantage of the opportunity.

“If we don't have answers to society's questions, there is a real danger that the culture will reinvent itself and leave the church right out of it.

“We can't blow this. This is the greatest chance for the churches to show their relevance since 9/11. My worry is that 9/11 was easy, and we blew it. This is hard.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.