

United Church of God *an International Association*

Clyde Kilough
Chairman

Roy Holladay
President

Letter from the President March 25, 2004

Dear Brethren,

Undoubtedly all of you have heard about the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Many are shocked at the violence and criticize the movie because of it. However, this perhaps shows that some people are not aware from the Scriptures what Christ went through.

As we review the Bible passages about the life, scourging, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during this time of year, maybe we have asked ourselves: “Why did Jesus have to endure the suffering that He did? Why could He have not died an ‘easier,’ less painful death? Why was it necessary for Him to have such pain inflicted upon Him? Why was it necessary for our salvation?”

In John 1:1-3 we read that God the Father and the Word (who became Jesus Christ) have existed eternally together. We understand from these verses that God the Father created all things through the Word. Would God and Christ create something without a plan and purpose? Certainly not. From the beginning of the universe God has had a master “blueprint” for His entire creation. The worlds were beautiful and in harmony (Hebrews 11:3).

Of course, a major part of this plan—again, before time began—involved Jesus Christ and our salvation through Jesus Christ. Notice 2 Timothy 1:9: “Who [God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” Ephesians 3:8-11 describes the “eternal purpose which He [God] accomplished in Christ Jesus.” In so many ways—carefully planned out before anything was created—Jesus Christ is the central figure in God’s purpose for us and the universe.

The natural extension of this truth is that the Lamb was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Long, *long* before Jesus Christ was born as a human baby He knew what He would need to endure. It was He who inspired the Old Testament prophets (some 58 distinct prophecies) to write about the scourging He would receive. Philippians 2:6-8 discusses clearly that Christ willingly humbled Himself, gave up His glory, left His habitation with the Father, became a servant and obeyed the will of the Father until His death on the cross.

Why? Why was His beating and crucifixion part of the plan? Look at 1 Timothy 1:15: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” In Hebrews 12:2 we also read: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Let us not forget John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

For the sake of our salvation, God the Father and Jesus Christ created a plan and purpose before the world began, and a major part of that plan was the beating and death of Jesus Christ. The recent movie portrayed these events very graphically. What do the Scriptures say? Why such an excruciating death? Notice this passage from Isaiah 53:3-10:

“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the

chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.”

Christ bore the pains of our body, the sins of our actions and thoughts. Sin produces rotten, ugly effects. It perverts our minds and it corrupts our hearts. It separates us from God. It produces mental and emotional scars. Our character is beaten, our mind wounded. The penalties of sin are spiritual, mental, emotional and physical—all of which lead to death.

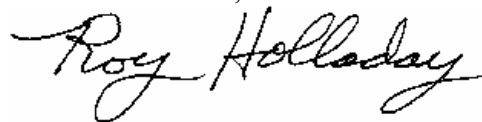
Notice the various words that Isaiah uses to describe the suffering Jesus endured: despised, rejected, sorrows, grief, stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, chastisement, stripes, oppressed and slaughter. And, again, why? For *our* transgressions. For *our* iniquities. For *our* peace. For *our* healing. This is why Jesus Christ had to go through such a terrible beating and death, so that in every way we may have the hope and chance of salvation.

From the beginning of time Christ knew He would have to suffer. He predicted His death to His disciples on several occasions (Mark 8:31-32; John 3:14; Matthew 20:17-19). The Passover symbols represent His broken body and His blood (Matthew 26:26-30). His final hours produced great mental anguish (Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:44).

Because of what He suffered, Jesus Christ is able to perfectly understand our needs and weaknesses, to show us compassion and give us the help we need. We can come to Him with boldness because of what He suffered and the great love it demonstrated for us (Hebrews 4:14-16). “Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:7-9). As our Savior, High Priest, Elder Brother and soon-coming King, Jesus knows our suffering, turmoil, doubts, fears, trials and tribulations in every way. He is our Advocate and Mentor.

His horrific death was indeed necessary because of the horrific sins and suffering of mankind. It was planned from before time. And it was carried out with the supreme love of the Father and Jesus Christ. As we prepare for the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, let us deeply and soberly contemplate these truths, and rejoice in our freedom through our Lord.

In Christ’s service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "In Christ's service,".

Roy Holladay

P.S. Our new booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* (which is being automatically sent to all members) is also being offered to 165,000 *Good News* subscribers during the next several days. We believe at this time of year, and with the renewed interest in Christ’s death, that we will receive an excellent response. Please pray that God would bless this effort and cause this seed to fall on fertile ground.