

The Best Retelling of the Greatest Story Ever Told The Gospel of John

By Dr. Ted Baehr

The Gospel is so compelling that people flock to churches that preach it and shun those that don't. It has given life to billions since the death and resurrection of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, it is coming to the big screen in a manner worthy of the greatest story ever told. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is the best big budget movie about Jesus produced up to this point, and it is the word-for-word Gospel itself.

In the golden age of Hollywood, there were several big budget Jesus movies of renown, including THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD, KING OF KINGS, and many others. However, in the last 20 years, there have been very few productions of the Gospel, and those that occurred were either small budget, like THE JESUS FILM (\$6 million), or THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (less than \$1 million), or they were blasphemous, like THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

Now, for the first time in at least one generation, there is a beautifully filmed, well-executed, wonderfully acted big budget production of the Gospel. I personally went into the screening thinking, "Oh oh, this will be just another Christian film; it was not. Produced by Garth Drabinsky, this Gospel movie has been done with care, love and attention to the demands of dramatic entertainment, and yet with not one word added or one word taken away from the Gospel account.

This movie is so gripping that at one point during the press screening, a reporter said, "If I watch much more of this, I'm going to become a Christian." Other movies, such as THE JESUS FILM, have used only part of the Gospel, 70% in that case, and the producers augmented it in order to enhance the drama of the movie. The director and writer of THE GOSPEL OF JOHN have found a way to present the story in a compelling fashion without diminishing or embellishing it.

Furthermore, there are several more Gospel movies coming out in the near future, such as THE PASSION, a powerful story of the passion of Christ; THE GOD MAN, produced by a former ABC Television executive, which is one of the best scripts I've ever read; THE LAMB, which is one of the most authentic approaches to the Gospel; and, THE NEW JESUS FILM, which covers the story from Creation to Revelation.

I recently asked one of the Executive Producers why there were so many films on this topic produced by Hollywood insiders. They answered that MOVIEGUIDE® has shown them that this is what the audience wants, because the more Christian content a movie has, the better it will do at the box office.

However, THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is not one of those movies you have to bring friends to and endure simply because you want to support Christian movies. It is a movie that will entertain you and have you praying that everyone will want to see it, so that God will move on their hearts to bring them into His kingdom.

We are extremely grateful that, since we started MOVIEGUIDE® and the Christian Film

and Television Commission™, we've gone from one movie with strongly positive Christian content to 45% of the movies released. The movies with negative Christian content have practically disappeared, and there are more films about Christian heroes—like LUTHER and BONHOEFFER—and more films about Jesus than ever before. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is the story of the Century, and we need to promote it from the housetops.

MovieGuide® Review: The Gospel of John

RATING: PG

RELEASE: Sept. 2003

TIME: 180 minutes

STARRING: Henry Ian Cusick, Daniel Kash, Stephen Russell, Richard Lintern, Scott Handy, and Christopher Plummer as the Narrator

DIRECTOR: Philip Saville

PRODUCERS: Garth H. Drabinsky and Chris Chrisafis

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Sandy Pearl, Joel B. Michaels, Myron Gottlieb, and Martin Katz

WRITER: John Goldsmith

DISTRIBUTOR: Think Film

The GOSPEL OF JOHN is the greatest story ever told in the most powerful language of the 21st Century. It is an inspired presentation of the Truth which will delight people of all ages.

Several years ago, the Visual Bible undertook the task of translating the Bible word for word, book for book, into the movie idiom of Hollywood. The first attempt was the Gospel of Matthew, which was a worthwhile production, though produced on a low budget. The next was Acts of the Apostle, which was again hobbled by a low budget.

Now, Visual Bible has been refinanced and has produced a spectacular, well-directed, well-acted, word for word version of the Gospel of John. In fact, the movie is so good that the Toronto International Film Festival has selected THE GOSPEL OF JOHN to have its world premiere at this year's event.

Although nothing is added to the biblical text, or taken away from it, the scriptwriter, John Goldsmith a committed Christian, has done a superb job of staging and setting the story in such a way that is constantly compelling. The lead is a Shakespearean actor, Henry Ian Cusick who gives an authoritative and yet warm and endearing portrayal of our Lord Jesus. The casting is much more Middle Eastern than any of the movies that have gone before, although not all the actors are Semitic. The historical details are accurate and faithful. In places where there could be debates, the filmmakers have wisely chosen to go with the authoritative and more literal and orthodox interpretation.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN brings the John's Gospel alive in a powerful, profound way. For the first time in this reviewer's memory, it becomes clear why Jesus and his Jewish followers were at odds with the Jewish establishment. Watching Jesus throw down the gauntlet of His messianic claims in the face of the Pharisees and Sadducees will clearly call people into the Kingdom of God. There is no ambiguity here. This is Jesus, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,

begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father, who is the Messiah.

There are several other Jesus films coming out soon. They all have their wonderful strengths, but what THE GOSPEL OF JOHN does is portray the Gospel in an unadulterated fashion and in the process clearly shows the victory of the Resurrection. For the first 300 years of the Church, all the pictures of Jesus were of the resurrected Christ. Most recent movies have concentrated on the cross. Some, like GODSPELL and JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR don't even have a resurrection, while, with Franco Zeffirelli's wonderful JESUS OF NAZARETH, the resurrection is an afterthought. Here, at last, is the full Gospel account, with Jesus appearing before the disciples, showing his wounds to Thomas, eating bread and fish with the disciples, and sending them into all the world to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God

There are other Jesus movies in preparation, but THE GOSPEL OF JOHN is the one that most Christians have been waiting for. It is inspired truth, a biblical sermon. Christians need to go into all the world to bring their friends to watch the Good News of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

All of this being said, it is important to recognize that this is the full Gospel and, therefore, it does not follow the dramatic formula of Hollywood. It is powerful and dramatic, but not structured in an Aristotelian fashion. Furthermore, as with any rendition of the life of Christ, there will be people who see Jesus differently, or have different images of the disciples. This is a tour de force of casting, but there are those who would have cast it differently, especially some of the minor roles. Actually, the only real negative is the opening legend which includes a reference to the date of the writing of The Gospel of John in a way that might alienate knowledgeable scholars and Christians. This should be reconsidered.

Also, as with any portrayal of Christ, one's image from reading the book will be different from what one sees on the screen. For one, I was enthralled by the cleansing of the temple. It was totally different than I had expected. Jesus' first challenge to the Pharisees is extremely intense and not as sugarcoated as is normally the case.

Finally, the intensity and the pacing in THE GOSPEL OF JOHN works extremely well. A movie is the sum of its parts, and all of the parts of THE GOSPEL OF JOHN come together to produce an magnificent whole. There is no doubt that THE GOSPEL OF JOHN will stand the test of time, and all those involved are to be commended: Bravo!

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