

Bruce Almighty: Just Ignore the Trailer

[Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this review are those of the reviewer, and not necessarily those of the John Ankerberg Show Television Ministry. After you have read this review and the companion piece by Dr. Ted Baehr, let us know what you think: Should Christians endorse ***Bruce Almighty***? We'll let you know the results of the poll in a couple of weeks.]

Review by Frederick Davis

Director: Tom Shadyac

Writers: Steve Koren, Mark O'Keefe, Steve Oedekerker

Starring: Jim Carrey, Morgan Freeman, Jennifer Anniston

I was with a group of friends last year when I first saw the trailer for *Bruce Almighty*. It depicted Jim Carrey as Bruce Nolan, a down-on-his-luck news reporter who, when he rails against God for dropping the ball, is "handed the reigns" and instructed to see if he can do a better job running the world (or part of it, anyway). He then proceeded to use his powers to do some naughty things.

We commented, almost in unison, on the obvious blasphemy. I found the basic premise interesting, but since it appeared to mock one of the defining attributes of God, his omnipotence, I expected it to make me very angry.

A few months later, I saw the trailer again, but this time, a question occurred to me. Had God been doing these things, of course, this would be blasphemous. But is it blasphemous to show a sinful man making bad decisions? After all, we remember how hotheaded Peter wanted to use his power to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritan village (Luke 9:54-56), and was strongly rebuked by Jesus.

At this point, I realized that the film could go in one of two directions. I hoped that it would take a Judeo-Christian worldview, showing that mankind has major problems, no matter how much power is given to them. But I feared it might take a humanist approach, and portray power as the only thing we need.

As I researched the film further, I discovered that the director, Tom Shadyac (*Liar Liar*, *The Nutty Professor*, *Dragonfly*) was a professing Christian. At this point, my interest was piqued. I hoped for the best, but I was prepared for anything.

Synopsis

The film begins with Bruce, a "wacky" television reporter with a knack for making people laugh, working his standard assignment; a syrupy sweet human-interest story. But for someone who claims Walter Kronkite as his hero, covering the baking of Buffalo, New York's largest cookie is somewhat less than rewarding.

He complains to his girlfriend, Grace (Jennifer Anniston, *Friends*, *The Good Girl*), about what he sees as his mediocre life, and blames every one of his problems on God, whom he compares to a kid sitting by an anthill with a magnifying glass, tormenting him.

The level of his self absorption is truly revealed in one of my favorite shots in the film. As Bruce sits, late for work, in a monstrous traffic jam, he beats the steering wheel and yells out, "This is my luck!" just as paramedics wheel a man in a full neck and back brace past Bruce's window.

Of course, Bruce's day goes downhill from there, the worst moment occurring when he finds out, while waiting to go on the air, that the promotion he wanted went to his workplace nemesis, Evan Baxter (hilariously played by Steven Carell, *The Daily Show*). He loses it and says the f-word while still on the air, which results in his getting fired.

This, along with a number of other events, causes Bruce to scream out at God. "You're the one who should be fired," he says, and challenges Him, "Smite me, O mighty smiter!"

God (Morgan Freeman, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Shawshank Redemption*) responds, but rather than smiting Bruce, he summons him to a sparse industrial loft where he offers Bruce a job. God will temporarily give him all of his power, since Bruce seems to think that he can do a better job. There are two rules, though. Bruce can't tell anyone that he's god, and he can't "mess with free will."

However, Bruce is only given the power of God, and not the wisdom. He proceeds to make a huge mess of things, resulting in everything from natural disasters to financial calamities. And when Grace becomes fed up with his immaturity and leaves, a broken Bruce says to God, "How do you make someone love you without affecting free will?" God replies, "Welcome to my world. When you figure that one out, let me know."

Bruce undergoes a dramatic change throughout the course of this film. The "sinful" choices he makes in the beginning (upon which the trailer focuses), are presented as negative, and the fact that there are consequences for these actions is made clear.

While he never prays the "sinner's prayer," he definitely has what I would call a "conversion experience." He literally falls on his knees before God and cries out, "I surrender to your will!"

Some complain that this film doesn't clearly present the Gospel of Jesus, and that's true, it doesn't. But it does focus on man's weakness in contrast with God's wisdom and love. In fact, Bruce ultimately realizes that true love for someone else comes only through seeing him or her through God's eyes.

Things For Parents To Be Aware Of

Bruce Almighty has a rating of PG-13, which it deserves. There is some swearing, including one use of the f-word, but such language is presented primarily in a negative light. (There is even a reference to the old Sunday school joke; "It's only ok to say 'ass' if you're talking about a donkey.")

Sexuality includes a scene in which Bruce (somewhat gratuitously) uses his powers to get Grace "turned on," as well as later increasing her bust size. (We don't see this part occur.) He also uses his powers to blow up a girl's skirt briefly as she passes by.

Crude humor includes the one moment in the film reminiscent of *Ace Ventura*, when Bruce causes a monkey to come out of a gangbanger's backside. (We don't actually see this happen.)

The Bottom Line

While the trailer presents the film as a comedy that makes light of God, the film itself

does just the opposite. God, as presented in this film, is loving, wise, graceful, and yes, holy. He has a sense of humor, but never laughs at a joke that is not above reproach.

Bruce Almighty does contain some elements that are not appropriate for younger viewers, but the ultimate message of the film is one that we as Christians can get behind. God is infinitely wiser and more loving than we are (Isa. 55:9), but he still expects us to do what we can to care for each other (John 13:35). God is always there when we need him (Jer. 33:3), but we shouldn't expect him to use miracles to solve all of our earthly problems (James 1:3).

As Christians, we know that the ultimate solution to the real problems of life come through the finished work of Christ on the cross. *Bruce Almighty* doesn't communicate that truth, but it doesn't deny it, either. (After all, does *It's a Wonderful Life* or *The Sound of Music* communicate the Gospel of Christ?)

Bruce Almighty is simply intended to plant a seed. It's up to God to bring the increase.