

Movies at Church?

by Wayne Goff

A local denomination here in the Northland has an annual tradition called “Christmas at the Movies.” They are offered with the explanation that “The Christmas movies we watch every year bring us back to the joy and hope and laughter we long for. Join us as we discover the deeper meanings in some of our favorites!”

Throughout the month of December, this church offered a different “Christmas movie” each Sunday, along with “tasty treats, hot chocolate and coffee.”

It isn’t hard to see what this church is trying to do. They are thinking that if they can just get people in the door, introduce them to some of their very nice members, members, and get them used to “going to church,” then hopefully they will return and make going a habit. I can appreciate their desire to increase attendance. But as I have heard said all of my life, “If you bring them in with coffee and donuts, you’ll have to keep them there with something more.”

Now I can think of some movies that would be worth considering in a Bible study along with a capable teacher:

- **“The Gospel of John”** — a movie which came out in 2003 that does nothing but bring to life the Gospel of John. You could show that movie as you go through the biblical text. It’s amazing how much you learn about the Bible’s content by “seeing” it brought to life.
- **“The Passion of the Christ”** — a 2004 movie directed by Mel Gibson which depicts the Garden of Gethsemane, the trial of Jesus, His beating and ultimate crucifixion. Though it has some Catholic-flavored influences, it is a movie worth watching to see the suffering through which Jesus went for you and me. It is **rated R** for the violence, but it is not sexual nor vulgar. However, watching the movie as an adult was difficult, just as reading the biblical text is difficult.
- **“The Ten Commandments”** — a 1956 movie about God delivering the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. It takes great liberties with the biblical text, but watching the parting of the Red Sea is memorable. It has been updated in recent years, but who can improve on Charlton Heston’s portrayal?

At least these movies deal with the biblical text, and can be great teaching tools. But this Northland church showed (1) **Christmas Vacation** — (the uncut version?); (2) **A Christmas Carol**; (3) **Elf**; (4) **The Santa Clause**. With the exception of “A Christmas Carol,” these movies are promoting nothing more than entertainment. And the church’s advertisement admitted as much.

Jesus’ Warning In John 6

Not only does pure entertainment for entertainment’s sake not have biblical authority for it, but Jesus warned twenty centuries ago of the danger of “luring” people with “food, fun and frolic.” It doesn’t work.

A large multitude of Jewish people followed Jesus during His early earthly ministry. He sometimes taught them all day, and at evening He made sure they were fed so that they would have the strength to return home. But then He perceived that some were following Him for no other reason than the free food!

In John 6, Jesus fed the multitude by a miraculous duplication of five barley loaves and two small fish. The entire multitude had plenty to eat and they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments! Those who saw this miracle rightly testified: *“This is truly the . . .*

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