



Le Mis: Russell Crowe as Inspector Javert

## Faith on the screen

### **Les Misérables** (M, 2012)

I believe many of our members may have seen this film at the cinema, but if you did not, or indeed want to sing along again, you can readily find it now on DVD (and often at an amazing price). The book and the stage versions were incredibly popular in the late 20th century and now this popularity continues in the new century.

A new generation of people have been exposed to the Christian context and underlying message and through DVD and download, more people will also see this movie in the future. If people missed some of the underlying Christian references in this film, they were either asleep or so secularised that the heritage of our Christian foundation is now unable to be perceived.

Prisoner 24601 (Jean Valjean) is played by Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe is Javert his nemesis who doggedly pursues him to the end, and an end that Javert simply cannot accept. Javert cannot understand the mercy that is offered by the one who has become his obsession. It appears he would rather have been shot, or at least rejected, rather than actually understood. The film version is a spectacle by itself, and follows on from other period works by director Tom Hooper who made *The King's Speech*. The period in this case is the first half of the 19th century, focusing on the turbulent 'back and forth' history of France following the end of the Napoleonic era and a period of social unrest and quasi-revolution. The era is well-captured in the costuming, the set buildings and occasional

images of the vulgar and hedonistic lifestyles that had developed.

Musicals sometimes have a little difficulty being translated from the intimacy of the stage to the large screen format, but overall this one is done well and the special effects enable some scenes to be more dramatised than before. Some aspects of the acting are slightly melodramatic and parts of the singing are limited, but Anne Hathaway's stunning turn as Fantine, especially for her version of 'I Dreamed a Dream' makes the film worthwhile by itself. She certainly deserved her Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, and she seemed to win every other similar award in this year.

Valjean's story of a man so touched by the mercy of another that he becomes a man who also shows mercy is a wonderful theme to consider. *Les Misérables* won the Epiphany Prize from MovieGuide for most inspiring film (2013). Watching this film with a group of friends at your home (perhaps with an intermission as it is a long film) could provide a gentle way into reflecting on the Christian story of forgiveness and hope.

### **Blue Like Jazz** (M, 2012)

While this initially seems a conventional Christian film, one is drawn into a far broader picture once the main character chooses the "broad path". The movie is based on a very popular semi-autobiographical novel by Donald Miller, and is set in a USA college.

Real-life Texan Marshall Allman plays Don, the Texas student from a Southern Baptist background who

chooses to go to a liberal arts college, rather than a bible college. For Don, the college is an eye-opener in all of the traditional ways as he is involved in various forms of experimentation, though always with a little hesitation. The film contrasts the Christian foundation he received as a child (and his application of it) with his inability to understand, let alone resist involvement in the new lifestyle, and then through a series of issues and relationships a new contrast with the beginnings of his re-considering of faith and understanding of grace and mercy.

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The movie is directed by Steve Taylor, who has had a well-established music and video career. Initially he struggled to secure funding, but the film is now something of an icon in terms of fundraising on 'KickStarter', a website-based arrangement where individuals from anywhere can contribute to a project they believe is worth supporting.

This is a more 'adult' Christian film for its themes and approach, but will certainly raise some issues for people to consider, and may well lead to helpful and probably pastoral conversations among those who have found similar bewilderment when their 'infant' faith is challenged. There is also the honest depiction of the developing conflict that arises from lifestyles that promise much, but in reality do not provide hope grounded in love.

*Blue Like Jazz* was showing as part of the Hoyts Faith on Film Sunday programme and is available on DVD.

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