



# NightLight

A NEWSLETTER OF McLEAN MINISTRIES

"take heed....as to a light that shines in a dark place." II Peter 1:19

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## Dear Friends,

*Whoever is pregnant with evil  
conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment.  
Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out  
falls into the pit they have made.  
The trouble they cause recoils on them;  
their violence comes down on their own heads.*

*Psalm 7: 14-16*



To attempt to remake any masterpiece is at best dangerous and at worst, foolishly arrogant. I and many from my generation have been very nervous over the new **BEN HUR** and I have (I am certain) worn out the ears of my kids, my students, and anyone else who would listen, that before they see the new **BEN HUR** they need to see the 1959 (the real) one. I can stop doing that to people now. The new **BEN HUR** is worth seeing. It doesn't mat-

ter if you see the one before the other because the new one wisely does not attempt to be a remaking, but only a variation on the telling of a story that needs to be told. Thankfully there is no attempt to approach the regal majesty of the original music score which is a spiritual experience in itself. They don't try to mimic any of the other iconic aspects.

I surprisingly did not find myself missing anything from the 1959 movie. (I know there were two previous versions, but there is no doubt about what is first in achievement and what is not. The 1959 release won eleven Academy Awards, back when that award was worth something valuable.) In the 1959 film, the face of Jesus is never shown and that makes His presence felt in a powerful imaginative way. In the new one His face is very present, and that provides a very different experience of Him; more human, more 'with us.' There is great good in both movies. See them both. Just don't demand the one in place of the other.

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I realized as I watched the new release how homogenized earlier 'Bible films' were. The newer films - **RISEN, YOUNG MESSIAH, THE PASSION**, etc.- are far more raw, true to reality, and less comforting to the senses. The high spiritual moments of films like the **TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD**, and **THE ROBE** are beautiful, reverent, and even moving, but they are marred by a kind of heavy-handed almost Shakespearean archaic posturing and verbiage that is hard for current audiences to endure. **BEN HUR** 1959 didn't have so much of that problem. The dialog is far more real to our modern ears, but it was almost four hours long. I can't see my grown kids or students viewing it all the way through, regardless of how much I keep telling them it is a masterpiece and they must see it. The new film is cut down to a bit over two hours and is so fast-paced that it will keep the attention of millennials, and that is the point if we want the story to get through to the heart.

I guess most vitally important of all is this: in the 1959 release I well remember the anger and hunger for revenge I felt towards Messala. When he is shredded beneath a chariot and dies in physical torment I, like Judah, liked that! But I have lived over forty years since then, and have found that **there is no sweetness ever in revenge**. Like Judah, I have learned that even after the 'justice' of revenge has come, **there is no freedom from the hate**. In fact, like Judah, **we simply become what we refuse to forgive**-we become Messala. Until the voice of the Lord can 'take the sword out of my hand,' I will go on hating, poisoning myself and others with a bitterness that will only grow with the passing of unsatisfied time.

SPOILER WARNING: In the new film there is complete forgiveness and restoration of family. As a father and now grandfather who has tasted some of the bitter tears of torn relationships, I can tell you this ending is better- not better in spectacle or pageantry, but in the heart of God for us. Note also it is very raw. By that I mean it is very agonizingly true to the reality of the ancient world in cruelty, sheer human agony of suffering, and pagan indifference to mercy. Yet in the midst of all that, the face of Jesus is a welcomed powerful intrusive contradiction against evil. And that speaks loudly to this generation. I still deeply love the majesty of His hidden face in the 1959 film as well. But in the darkness of our current human hate-fest and screams for 'justice' on our own terms, the more human present Face appearing with sorrow in their sorrow is a welcomed image. This is the One we all need to hold in our hearts until we see His Face for real. While I was moved by the 1959 film towards worshipful awe, this release moved me to repentance. Is there some place in you still held captive by revenge and unforgiveness? See both films, and may you become the one who can say with Judah, "I felt His words take the sword out of my hand."





# Thanks!



Mary and I have been absolutely overwhelmed by your outpouring of sympathy regarding the death of my mom. The number of cards, emails, and phone messages has been more than we can possibly respond to one at a time. Thank you, each one, for your sincere expressions of love. Please, please know that every communication was taken deeply to heart. We were helped by them, strengthened and encouraged through them, and we cannot ever thank you enough for the way you have always been there for us in our rough times.

# September



# Closing Thoughts...



*It is such a comfort to journey together with you all on our way Home to Love Himself.*

*Lifting high the Cross,  
Clay & Mary*



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