Denison Forum

By Jim Denison

Why is the Greg Laurie movie Jesus Revolution so popular?

Jesus Revolution, a movie about a spiritual awakening in California in the early 1970s, is nearing $46 million in ticket sales as of this morning. In so doing, it has matched or surpassed The Fabelmans, The Banshees of Inisherin, Tár, Women Talking, and Triangle of Sadness, combined. (For more on Jesus Revolution, see our review, as well as our interview with director Jon Erwin in The Denison Forum Podcast.)

Why is the movie striking such a chord with so many millions of people?

Rev. Greg Laurie, a California pastor and central figure in the movie, writes: "We were created to worship. And when you get down to it, every person on Earth does worship. We don't all worship the God of heaven, but we all worship someone or something. It may be a sports figure, an entertainer, or someone else. It may be a possession. But everyone bows at some kind of altar."

The pastor continues: "Even atheists worship. Skeptics worship. Republicans and Democrats worship. Independents worship. Everyone, everywhere, worships. It's the fundamental drive of life and one of the unique distinctions of humanity."

This is because, as Rev. Laurie notes, "God has placed eternity in the human heart (see Ecclesiastes 3:11)."

Every person you know is looking for God in some way. Every person, whatever their public or private stance on faith and religion, is made by God for God. This is a fact beyond their control. It is a reality St. Augustine famously voiced sixteen centuries ago: "*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you*" (Confessions 1.1.1).

As a result, no matter how dark the days seem to be, you and I should have an "abundance mentality" that expects the King of the universe to use us in making a transforming difference in our lost world. As we will see today, it is always too soon to give up on God.

"No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars"

Evidence that biblical morality is best for us continues to grow. For example, the Wall Street Journal headlines, "For Long-Term Health and Happiness, Marriage Still Matters." By contrast, studies have clearly linked premarital sex to divorce.

While our secularized culture conflates success with happiness, another Wall Street Journal article reports the opposite: "We're all sprinting on what psychologists call a hedonic treadmill. That is, we might get a hit of joy when we achieve something, but we eventually return to our baseline level of happiness (or unhappiness). Whatever heights we reach, we're still, well, us."

This is because we are fallen people living in a fallen world.

The annual "Stress in America Survey" reports that stress is "rising rapidly" as a result of escalating inflation, concerns about possible Russian cyberattacks or nuclear threats, fears that a World War III could break out, and worries about money and the economy. Unsurprisingly, 90 percent of US adults say the United States is experiencing a mental health crisis.

The depressing news cycle exacerbates our angst. Bad news generates more interest than good news, contributing to a "negativity bias" that conditions us to pessimism about the world around us. As the axiom goes, "A pessimist is never disappointed."

However, as Helen Keller noted, "No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit." Winston Churchill added, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

Who was the first named disciple of Jesus?

If I asked you to name the first named disciple of Jesus, whom would you nominate? Peter, the preacher of Pentecost? John, the "beloved disciple"? James, or Matthew, or Thomas? The answer is Andrew (John 1:40; John is the other disciple in the narrative, but he does not name himself).

As soon as he began following Jesus, what did Andrew do? "*He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah*' (which means Christ). *He brought him to Jesus"* (vv. 41–42), thereby becoming the first evangelist in Christian history. Andrew later brought some Greek inquirers to Jesus (John 12:20–22), thereby becoming the first cross-cultural missionary in Christian history. He went on to plant churches across modern-day Ukraine, Romania, and Russia, making him the patron saint of all three nations and the 140 million Christians who are his spiritual descendants.

Andrew was ultimately crucified for his Lord. However, according to reliable early tradition, he testified that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord, so he was crucified on an X-shaped cross that is known today as "St. Andrew's Cross."

But there was a time when Andrew was not so heroic. When five thousand families were following Jesus, he asked his disciples, "*Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"* (John 6:5). Andrew responded: "*There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?*" (John 6:9). Jesus then turned that small boy's tiny lunch into a feast for the multitude.

"What are they for so many?"

Andrew's question is our question. We read of rising animosity against our Father and our faith, then we look at our capacities and ask, "What are they for so many?" We look at the spiritual, financial, and material needs of our day, then turn to our resources and ask the same question.

In response, consider the counsel of Pope St. Leo the Great (died AD 461): "Do not be put off by a lack of resources. A generous spirit is itself of great wealth, and there can be no shortage of material for generosity where it is Christ who feeds and Christ who is fed. His hand is present in all this activity: his hand, which multiplies the bread by breaking it and increases it by giving it away."

Will you put your "lunch" in his hands today?

Jim Denison Ph.D speaks and writes on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 113,000 subscribers in 208 countries. See more on the website www.denisonforum.org. Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.