

I Have A Dream - Our Gospel Motivation

REVIEW: Good, I see many faces came back after last week's message on time and schedules. I tried to walk a fair line regarding life, schedules and commitment to God. My prayer is that, while it may have made some of you uncomfortable, it did not apply guilt unnecessarily. If you have not been submitting your time to God as a first fruits scenario (first fruits is when the God asked Israel to give the first 10% of the crops to Him and trust Him to provide for them out of the other 90%), and you felt guilty, okay, that is what you should feel. But, please don't stay there. Guilt is only good when it leads to godly repentance. Do not stay in that guilty place, submit yourself and your time to God and allow Him to minister to you, and direct your use of time from here forward.

INTRO: This morning I want to turn a corner in our series by talking about...musicals. And not just musicals in general, but a specific musical that was adapted from a book, which was actually based on the life of a man the author knew. This musical is well loved across the country - having played on Broadway for 16 years beginning in 1987. It is one that I had the privilege of seeing three times in my life - twice in Chicago, and once in Providence, R.I. It is a story of redemption, which is initially touched off because of an act of grace and mercy by a bishop to a former convict. The story is Les Miserables.

I. The storyline of Les Miserables

A. First let me tell you that I really do believe that the book is something I think everyone should read at least once in their lives

1. If you take me up on that, I will tell you that unless you want to read something akin to *War and Peace* make sure you get an abridged copy
2. The full text of Les Miserables is about 2200 pages long, and has various things contained in the story that have nothing really to do with the storyline itself

a) So unless you really want a good bread recipe from 1800 France, get an abridged copy

b) I even have one that I would be willing to lend out.

B. The book centers on the life of Jean Valjean

1. He had been arrested for stealing bread to feed his sister and her family

a) He served 19 years in prison at hard labor for his crimes

b) Generally when you see the musical the story picks up on the day of his release in conversation with what would become his nemesis through life, Inspector Javert

(1) In this conversation in the musical, Valjean states that he has been a prisoner to the law

(2) Something that is often true of many of us - and was true of Javert

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2. When he is released, as a former prisoner he has to show his yellow card that he has served time, as well as check in at certain places and times
 - a) That makes it very difficult to get a job or for people to trust him at all
 - b) It leaves him very bitter and angry until finally he is offered food and shelter by a bishop
 - c) Even at this act of mercy, Valjean acts more like a stray dog that has to fight for his food, inhaling his food and not waiting for prayer rather than a man who has been shown compassion
3. In the night, Valjean steals the silver from the bishop and takes off running
 - a) He is caught by the authorities who bring him back to the bishop
 - b) When asked if the silver was his, the bishop replies, "No, it was a gift. But my friend, you forgot the best pieces." He grabs the two very large silver candlestick holders and gives them to Valjean also.
 - (1) Satisfied but perhaps skeptical the police leave
 - (2) The bishop then tells him that his life has been spared for God
 - c) This sends Valjean into a tailspin
 - (1) How could this man be so merciful?
 - (2) He had the ability with one word, just one word to send him back to the prison he came from for life
 - (3) It makes Valjean keenly aware of his sinful lifestyle to which he then vows to change his ways
 - (a) To do so meant breaking his parole
 - (b) He took the silver that the bishop had given him, starting over a new life - being a businessman, the mayor of the town, and a very kind and compassionate man
4. This is the beginning of our lesson on the gospel, and how all of this fits with church membership, attendance and where we are headed in future weeks
 - a) Genuine grace and mercy leaves a mark
 - b) In the story, Valjean has a difficult time reconciling genuine mercy
 - (1) He is so used to people treating him with suspicion and contempt
 - (2) And here the bishop, with Valjean's life literally in his hands
 - (a) He does not send him back to prison
 - (b) He does not extort money or work out of him, holding his silence over Valjean's head
 - (c) He not only forgives him for stealing from him, but he lavishes love on him
 - (3) This is the gospel folks
 - (a) While we were still sinners, with our hands caught in the cookie jar - Christ died for us

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- (b) God lavishes love upon us that we in no way deserve
- (c) We did nothing to deserve God's extravagant love, mercy and grace - and that is what makes it so wonderful

- i) Valjean did nothing to deserve the meal, much less the bishop forgiving him and giving him the silver
- ii) Yet that is the picture of us - we did nothing (but the wrong things) and God did everything to help us to a new life

II. To pull out the areas I want to highlight regarding the gospel, and where we are headed in future weeks, I will have to jump around in the story from here on out

A. We fast-forward about eight years in Valjean's life to where he has made something of himself as a business man and mayor

1. Javert has moved from prison guard to Inspector, and has become the Inspector for the same town that Valjean is the mayor of

a) Valjean has changed his appearance, and is not recognized at their first meeting

b) Valjean gets called away to help a man that is trapped under a cart that has fallen on him, and Javert has followed to see what the commotion is

(1) What I have not told you is that Valjean was well known for his strength

(2) He proceeds to lift the cart off of the man so others could slide him out

(3) At this, Javert thinks he recognizes him as Valjean, the prisoner that broke his parole

(a) Javert inquires about it to the authorities

c) The next time we see the two men meet, Javert is admitting that he had mistaken him for this prisoner, but knows it could not be him because they caught the escapee Valjean and he will be in court soon

(1) Javert asks for no mercy and is prepared to resign his post in shame

(2) But Valjean tells him there is nothing to forgive - he was only doing his duty

(a) Valjean has the power over Javert - the man that mercilessly enforced his punishment for years

(b) And here Valjean shows compassion to Javert

i) Who by the way struggled with receiving mercy

(3) But this is not the last time that Valjean will show mercy to Javert

(a) Later in the story, during the time of the revolution, Javert is captured by the revolutionaries

(b) Valjean comes to the barricade to help protect a young man named Marius

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- (c) Valjean asks to be able to deal with this prisoner so the young men do not have to be the ones to execute him
 - (d) Instead of executing Javert, and ending a life of hiding, Valjean releases him
 - i) Javert actually thinks it is so Valjean can make a deal
 - ii) Valjean says that there are no strings attached - just go
2. This is a second mark of the gospel - that when one has truly been marked by the gospel, it changes how we treat those around us
- a) Valjean several times in the story had the power over Javert, and he treated Javert with nothing but kindness
 - b) Valjean had received mercy and it left its mark
 - (1) It left its mark so deeply that he was able to forgive Javert for his treatment of him
 - (2) He was able to extend grace and mercy to a man that had shown him none of those things and could not even wrap his mind around those things
 - c) In fact, when you contrast Valjean and Javert, we see the difference between
 - (1) Follower of Jesus and Pharisee
 - (a) Javert loved the law - as many of the songs in the musical attest to
 - (b) He was a self-made man, including his righteousness
 - i) He followed the law
 - ii) The law is what made him right before God
 - (c) We discover this in part when we find out in a scene of confrontation that part of the reason that Javert hates Valjean so much is Javert himself was from the "gutter" and he has made something of himself
 - i) Valjean was a reminder, in his mind, of where he came from
 - ii) And Javert was too disciplined to go back
 - (d) I see far too many Christians that embrace this type of life
 - i) They are justified by their good work
 - ii) They love the law, and having checklists so they know they have done the right thing
 - iii) For people to know the real them is shameful and so they keep it hidden behind good works
 - iv) Mercy actually hurt these folks and they do not have a peg in their life to hang that on - its works righteousness for them

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(2)Then there is Valjean

(a)For a time, even after receiving mercy, he hid from his true self
- the sinner shown mercy

i) Part of the reason has to do with the environment and
cultural climate

ii)We will be dealing with that in future weeks

(b)But he could not run from who he really was

i) If you remember Javert said they arrested a man thinking
him to be Valjean

ii)Valjean, after struggling with what to do and how to handle
it, walked into the court and testified that he himself was
Valjean and this man did not bear any guilt

(1)Again, mercy

(2)And an understanding of his position as a sinner that
received mercy

(c)He is a picture of a true Christian that understands his position
before God

i) While we may not be excited to see who we are, we trust in
the mercy and grace of God to make us new

B.At the same time that Valjean and Javert meet eight years after his release, we
meet Fantine

1. She is a worker in Valjean's factory that gets let go because it is
discovered that has a child she is attempting to support, and she is
probably "sleeping around" to pick up the extra money - which she is not

2. Ironically, Fantine is forced to sell her locket, her hair, two teeth, and
finally herself to make extra money to pay the people that are "caring" for
her daughter

3. Later, Valjean becomes aware of her situation, and how she was fired from
his factory unfairly

a) Fantine has become ill due to the life she is forced to live

b) Valjean takes her to the hospital to care for her

4. As she lay dying, he tells her that he will care for her child as if she was
his own, and she will want for nothing

a) Yet another display of mercy

b) Valjean was lavished on in mercy, love, and wealth and now he has the
opportunity to lavish on someone else

(1)At that time the prevailing theology was God blessed the rich and
basically cursed the poor because of their stations in life

(a)Poor theology to be sure

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(b) Reminds you of the disciples asking Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

(2) Indeed, God had blessed the rich - but not to turn a blind eye to humanity, but to bless humanity as well

(3) A second thing this points out to us is that you do not have to save everyone

(a) Valjean did not try to lavish on every person around

(b) He found one woman that needed his help, and he felt in part responsible for what happened as he left his foreman to figure things out and the foreman threw Fantine out

(c) He reached out and lavished on her and her daughter

5. Fantine passes away, and the rest of the story is about Valjean getting her daughter and caring for her

a) We see her grown up, fall in love with the boy at the barricade, Marius

b) In fact they even marry before the end of the story

C. There are many other amazing examples of love, mercy and grace in the midst of trial and tragedy

1. These stories give us enough to walk through three main things we have already been pointing out in the story

III. Three main things that will serve us well in our faith as we consider the story and our lives

A. Our motivation for all of the Christian life, including belonging to a church family (membership), submitting our schedules to God as our first fruits of time, submitting ourselves to one another in loving relationships, and serving others all flow out of the grace and mercy we received in Christ

1. It's called the gospel, and we have discussed in the past how it is not just how we enter the Christian life, but how we live it

2. The story of Les Misérables brings this out in brilliant fashion

a) The grace and mercy that were shown to Valjean at the beginning of the story so marked him that it changed his whole life

b) We see pictures of that grace and mercy again and again through the story - too many for me to include them all in this message

3. I think there needs to be some serious reflection on the gospel in most people's lives

a) The fact that you were guilty of sin before God and it would only take a word from Him to condemn you

b) Instead of the word of condemnation, you hear words of mercy, words of love - words that seem unbelievable to you

c) Reminds me of another story from the life of Jesus

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- (1)The Pharisees (law followers) tried to trap Jesus by bringing a woman to him that was caught “in the very act” of adultery
- (2)They wanted to trap Jesus between the law and the people - the law calls for judgment, the people are hoping for mercy
- (3)Jesus only response when pressed - “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”

(a)After everyone left Jesus asked the woman, “Where are those who condemn you?” “Gone” she replied

(b)“I don’t condemn you either. Go and leave your life of sin.”

i) Sound a lot like what I described with Valjean

(1)It would not surprise me if Victor Hugo, the author had this passage in mind

(2)I know he based the book in part on the life of someone he knew

ii)Let me point out one more thing in this passage - the fact that Jesus said “Go and sin no more.”

(1)If you follow the whole story, that is close to what the bishop said to Valjean

(2)Too many people think that God does not expect people to live by a list of don’ts

(a)Some embrace the grace but shun the stop sinning part

(b)That is called cheap grace and must be squashed

(3)Jesus still called what she did as sinful

(a)Some say that saying something is sin IS condemning

(b)Obviously not. Jesus separated the two

4. This grace and mercy that has been shown to us should be reflected in everything we do

B. Which brings me to my second point we take away from this story, and where we will be headed in future weeks - that because of the gospel we can be fully known

1. In our story, Valjean could not be fully known, less because of not coming to grips with his sin

a) He knew he was a sinner

b) He knew he had done wrong

c) His issue was the culture around him

2. For us, the fact that the gospel shows us our inability to overcome sin without the Savior frees us

a) It frees us to live open lives about who we are

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- b) It frees us to not hide our weaknesses, but reveal them, submit them to Christ, and glory in how He works in and through our weaknesses
- 3. That means that we don't have to put on a charade for others
 - a) Valjean did have to wear a mask
 - b) We do not
 - c) I do not have to perform for you to be accepted because God accepted me in my sinful state
 - (1) He knows what I am like on my worst possible day and loves me
 - (2) He knows what I am like on my best day and still loves me
 - d) To hide all of that is to hide who we really are from others that can help us
 - (1) Look, because we are prone to sliding from holiness, God gave us specific things to help us
 - (a) His Word is obviously one of those things
 - (b) But one another is one of the best things
 - i) You really need to look this up - write this down - go to crosswalk.com and put in the words "one another" in quotes
 - ii) See how many commands there are for us in our one anothers
 - (2) When we as individuals realize that we do not have to perform for others but they are really there to help spur us on, we collectively can drop the act and thereby change our culture
- 4. I will be going into this soon in our series - about what we need to do to change our culture into one of openness and transparency
- C. The last thing from our story is that the gospel changes us in how we show grace and mercy to those around us
 - 1. It means that we serve the people around us
 - a) In the story, which I didn't mention earlier, but you would see Valjean out in the streets giving aid to those in need
 - b) The biggest example was his help with Fantine, which had a unique set of circumstances attached to it
 - 2. Because we have been so changed by the gospel, we look for ways in which we can serve those around us
 - 3. That can be through extending forgiveness and mercy like Valjean did with Javert
 - 4. It can be through direct intervention like helping people on the street or taking in someone in need
 - 5. Service can take on so many faces which we will talk about in future weeks as well

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IV. Putting it all together

- A. We have talked about the gospel and how it affects us to the deepest parts of who we are
- B. We have talked about time, and how we give that time as an offering to the Lord
- C. In coming weeks we are going to talk about the most effective use of your time considering how the gospel has marked us
 - 1. Let's face it, life is fast paced and time is at a premium
 - 2. How do we display the deep marks of the gospel on our lives when society around us moves at breakneck speed, and militates against our using our time for the Lord
- D. Two ways in which in the coming weeks we will explore so we can be practical and wise in our use of time
 - 1. We already talked about that first ten percent for the Lord
 - 2. But how?
 - 3. By being involved in a group where you can be known, loved, and push on toward deeper intimacy with Christ
 - 4. Second, by having a regular means of serving the Lord
 - 5. That is where we are headed
 - a) We want to see every person in this church involved in a small group setting where they can study the Bible, and be genuine, real and open
 - b) We want everyone in this church to be involved in some manner of service
 - (1) And when we get to that part we will be really specific
 - (2) I want to make it practical for what areas are in need, how we as a church can equip you, and then allow you to follow where God leads you to serve