

**Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest. A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor (Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Touchstone, August 2006. Reprinted with permission.)**

“Ahoy me hearties.” If you want 2 and half hours of escapist action, purchase tickets for the *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. This is a movie driven neither by plot, nor by the star cast, but by scene after scene of action, seasoned with liberal doses of imagination and plenty of humour.

The plot (although it hardly deserves the title) focuses around Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp). He is searching for a way to repay a debt, unpaid to the legendary Davey Jones, captain of the mythic Flying Dutchman. While Jack is searching for redemption and Davey Jones is searching for Jack, so too are the English navy. They capture the soon to be married Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) and Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley), and offer them their freedom in exchange for turning Captain Jack's and his miraculous compass into English hands. Such talk of searching and redeeming unpaid debts starts to sound like a good old-fashioned church sermon on the nature of sin and redemption.

One of the recurring questions I face in my Bible College of New Zealand Gospel and Film classes concerns what movies Christians should watch. *Dead Man's Chest* becomes a fascinating case study.

For a moral purist, this movie would be deemed safe. There is neither bad language, nor sex scenes and the violence is limited to old-fashioned swordplay. But *Dead Man's Chest* becomes more darkly complex if you consider the underlying theologies offered by plot and character.

Take the acting of Johnny Depp. Born in 1963, his versatile acting has earned critical acclaim and audience popularity in over 46 movies. From the lonely scarred Edward in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), to the eccentric Willie Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) (see my review in Touchstone, October 2005), Depp has earned a reputation as a seriously good actor.

Depp is, once again, seriously good in *Dead Man's Chest* as the roguish, yet lovable, Jack Sparrow. It is a similar type of role to *Chocolat* (2000), when Depp plays a guitar-strumming gypsy. Both are carefree, happy-go-lucky, roguish leaders on the fringe of society. But does a twinkle in the eye of a buffoon legitimate his acts of human betrayal? In *Dead Man's Chest*, Jack is being pursued by the British Empire and the East India Company who desire to rule the oceans for commercial gain. So is the pirate acts of Jack Sparrow legitimated if they resist the evils of Empire?

In explicitly Christian language, how do we judge human actions? Is betrayal legitimated if done with a twinkle or to resist Empire? Do multiple betrayals make a right? Considering the trajectory of character and narrative in *Dead Man's Chest* offers an “All aboard” to Christian film reviewers wanting to probe beyond a puritanical fascination with the presence, or absence, of bad language and female breasts. It also offer a simple “Ahoy me hearties” to anyone seeking a good evening of entertainment.

500 words

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