

Review

film: *The Greatest Showman*

Loosely following the life of Victorian entrepreneur Phineas Taylor Barnum, *The Greatest Showman* transports us back to the exhilarating and controversial, emerging world of circus entertainment.

We meet Barnum, a warm hearted, inclusive individual who seems to want to bring purpose and employment to the lives of the misfits of his time. Following the failure of Barnum's 'museum of curiosities', the story begins as we meet some of the eclectic individuals who make up the Barnum circus: a bearded woman, a hair covered man, a dwarf, and an eight-foot 'giant'.

Song after song spells out the desires of the hearts of those in the troupe. Whether it's the defiant stance of the bearded woman, happy in her own skin in the song *'This Is Me'*, or the struggle against racism in *'Rewrite the Stars'*, they are expressions of the fundamental desire to be accepted and loved. Each musical number is spectacular. The costumes are as vibrant and the choreography as jaw-dropping as the real Barnum himself would have wanted. Although the storyline may be wanting and the character development shallow, the theatrical effects are amazing.

However, although Barnum wants to be a success in his family and business, he loses his way. The success of one act leads Barnum far from the things he loves most: his household and showmanship.



The common denominator of the plot and all the sub-stories is the search for acceptance, welcome and love. Barnum brings together people who have been rejected and gives them something to belong to, as he himself is accepted by those he's wronged. As the perceptive bearded woman puts it, 'Maybe you are a fraud. Maybe it was just about making a buck.'

But you gave us a real family.' Barnum's circus celebrated diversity, yet it's hard to know what was fake and what was authentic. Was Barnum an altruistic philanthropist or a shrewd businessman exploiting the people in his show? In 2019, the longing for acceptance

hasn't died. The way the movie has been celebrated so much shows that people still crave to be welcomed and loved.

This fundamental striving for belonging is the fallout from the catastrophic fragmentation of our relationship with God at the fall. When we see how Christ welcomes us into God's family, we see how differing people can be loved and outsiders can be brought in forever. It's an astoundingly beautiful truth of the gospel: everyone is welcomed into an unconditional, indiscriminate family for eternity, and the one who welcomes us rejoices over us with singing.¹ What a truth the world wants and needs to know! ■

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