



The King's Speech

Duty, Desire and Devotion

According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. So, we can resonate with King George VI in this film, as his stutter leaves him dreading giving the King's speech. For many of us, we can face down enemies but we cannot face an audience. Part of this is psychological, part mechanical. But with practice and prayer we can get through.

The King's Speech is surely one of the best movies of 2010 and has picked up 12 Oscar nominations to prove this. The title is a double entendre, pointing both to the malady of the king and to the climactic address to the British nation at the start of World War 2.

The film begins a decade earlier before he is king. He is still the Duke of York, also known as Prince Albert (Colin Firth).

Required to give a speech over the new technology of wireless radio at the closing of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Stadium, this short speech took forever. The stuttering Prince stands embarrassed, even humiliated. His wife, Elizabeth (Helena Bonham Carter), sits discomfited beside him.

When she takes it upon herself to bring him to the leading doctors and speech pathologists of the day – none can help him. His speech impediment persists,

causing him to feel scorned by his father, King George V (Michael Gambon), and ridiculed by his brother, Prince David (Guy Pearce), who later becomes King Edward VIII. This defect drove him inward, contributing to his angry temperament and his desire to shun the public

eye. Yet his "job" precludes this; he must do his duty and represent the crown at various social and public events.

At wit's end, Elizabeth is referred to Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), an Australian speech coach, whose

peculiar and controversial methods make him successful with his patients but spurned by fellow professionals. When he meets "Mr. Johnson" he is surprised to find a royal prince waiting in his office. His methods and manner shock and offend the prince at first, but eventually he comes back.

An initial question by Lionel to "Bertie" (Prince Albert) raises pertinent issues. He asks him what he wants of him. He wants to be cured, obviously, but Bertie

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seems doubtful; it cannot be done. He has no faith in the healer. He walks away initially without a cure. This is just like the question Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Matt. 20:32) The blind replied, "We want our sight" (Matt. 20:33) and he touched them and healed them (Matt. 20:34). They went away healed based on their faith in Jesus' power. But in another incident, a father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples who could not exorcize the spirit. When Jesus found out, he said "Everything is possible for one who believes." (Mk. 9:23) But the father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24) This is so typical of humanity. We are like this. Our faith is limited, our eyes remain blind, and our tongues remain mute or stuttering. When it comes to unconventional cures, we, like Bertie, remain unconvinced. Oh, we of little faith.

As a period piece, this drama brings all we have come to expect: credible costumes, top-flight British actors, and a fantastic script. The icing on the cake is the acting of Colin Firth.

In almost every scene, he conveys the deep inner pain of someone whose problem is evident to all, and who cowers before his male relatives. He won the Golden Globe for this performance and should pick up the Oscar, too.

Rush and Carter also do excellent work in their roles, and

earned Oscar nominations, but they are totally outshined by Firth.

Confusing to some may be the changes in names of the two key princes. David is the heir to the throne, but when his father dies he selects the title King Edward

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VIII. Prince Albert, when he succeeds to the throne, chooses to be called King George VI, because Albert is too Germanic, and England is soon to be at war with Germany, and for continuity with his father. The film explains that King Edward's love for American divorcee Wallis Simpson caused him to abdicate the throne. We see David's own pain as he is torn between his duty to his country and his love for a woman. His act of love thrusts Albert onto the throne and into the spotlight where public speeches are an expected and regular duty.

Duty is a second theme. Albert's duty was to serve his people, even if self-interest desired him to stay in the shadows. Lionel's duty was to serve his patient, and eventually his king. Sworn to secrecy, his duty required that he could not even tell his family about his famous patient. Both main characters placed duty above self-interest. It is like this for us, too. As followers of Jesus, we have a duty to him and his mission. He has commanded us to love each other (Jn. 15:12) and to take the good news of salvation to a lost and dying world (Matt. 28:19). Self-interest might have us remain at home, comfortable in our cocoon, but duty calls us to obedience out of love for our Savior.

Of course there would be no story if Lionel failed to help the king. He has a style all his own, including rolling around on the floor, singing a speech, and swearing loudly and profusely. Indeed, the only reason this otherwise family-friendly film gets an R-rating is for a couple of sequences where Albert drops the f-bomb multiple times.

Ultimately, this is a poignant film about friendship across social boundaries. In his first encounter with Lionel, Bertie expects him to treat him as royalty and address him as "Your Royal Highness". Instead, Lionel says he goes by his first name and expects the same from his patient: "I'll call you Bertie." The Prince is not accustomed to this. Going further, Lionel tells him, "My castle, my rules." He does not stand on title or ceremony.

Lionel, as an Australian, is something of a second class citizen in the country that was the head of the empire. A failed actor, he is depicted as someone who has

few friends. Prince Albert has no friends. His royal title places him above, and separates him from, the common man. These two isolated loners slowly become friends. And it is in that friendship, with trust at its core that the Prince finds the faith to believe in his friend's methods.

This friendship is an analogy, of sorts, of our relationship with Christ. God is our King (Psa. 47:7) and we are his people (Psa. 100:3). Yet he has chosen to come down to meet us in the form of a man, in the person of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:6-7). The royal sovereign wishes to enjoy a friendship with us, where we can refer to him by a familial name, "Abba," (Rom. 8:15) rather than a formal title. The boundary he crossed was infinitely wider than the one King George VI traversed. Jesus wants to sit with us and spend time together. He is devoted to us and wants us to be devoted to him. Will we let him?

In perhaps the best scene of the film, the Archbishop (Derek Jacobi) challenges Lionel's credentials, and is ready to cast him back to the gutters, where social custom would have him dwell. Lionel replies with a heartfelt speech about his experiences with trauma victims in World War 1 that puts the archbishop in his place and propels the Prince to show the depths of their friendship.

In the end, Lionel helped Albert speak better, though he never totally overcomes his lifelong stammer. But he relied on his friend in his time of trial. That friendship enabled the King to deliver his speech, bringing him unexpected applause. Moreover, it brought two men together in a relationship that lasted a lifetime. Surely, this was better than total triumph over his deficiencies. Long live the King!

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Martin works as an engineering manager in the high tech industry. He leads a monthly film review group at Mosaic Church in Portland, Oregon. He writes film responses from a biblical perspective on his blog: www.mosaicmovieconnectgroup.blogspot.com

Contact: martinbaggs@gmail.com

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