

From Deckard's Desk



Phantom vs. Les Misérables – Fun vs. Filling

I'm certainly no expert when it comes to critiquing a movie, play or musical. But I do know how my soul responds to different presentations and how they leave me when the curtains close. Case in point, the difference between what I experienced in *The Phantom of the Opera* versus what I experienced *Les Misérables*. *The Phantom of the Opera* was a truly entertaining story with some amazing vocal performances and melodies. Who can forget "Think of Me?" I certainly got caught up into the love story. I suppose I would say that the experience was *fun*. But I've never had the urge to see it again in large measure because it didn't *do* anything for me (my sincerest apologies to the Phantom fans out there).

My first experience of *Les Misérables* was very different. The unfolding effect of one man's mercy on another (the priest to Jean Valjean) was nothing less than worshipful – the way the convict was turned to a man of selfless compassion through a simple act of grace. Then to see the domino effect of his life touching others like a prostitute (Fontaine) who is remarkably transformed into a self-sacrificing mother stirred my hope in the power of redeeming love. The whole musical pulsed with redemptive depth that prompted me to contemplate the eternal, the divine, the gospel and the goodness of God. I left the experience amazed, filled, and to some degree...changed. It was a vivid display of how merciful love changes people from the inside out.

This illustrates the difference between two types of experiences – *fun* versus *filling*. If you think about it, it's not hard to experience fun – a slapstick movie, a stupid joke or an out-of-tune karaoke singer on a cruise ship. (It's funny! I know!) But it has little nutritional value for the soul. Like cotton candy, it tastes sweet for the moment with no enduring value. But when something or someone draws the mind and heart to contemplate true greatness – something that usually takes greater focus, attention and thought – then there is a deep and enduring sense of satisfaction. You feel *full*.

The challenge for us each day is to be able to *discern* and *pursue* that which *fills* over that which is *fun*. That's not to say, of course, that there's no place for mindless fun (*Napoleon Dynamite* has its place...maybe). But let's face it, most people spend more time in the pursuit of *fun* than the pursuit of what *fills*. The short of it is that if we are to experience change from one degree of glory to another, then our attention must be riveted on that which *fills* without settling for the junk food of that which merely *entertains*.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ~Philippians 4:8