



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 27, 2012

Les Misérables: A Powerful and Engaging Film

Released on Christmas Day, *Les Misérables* is a powerful, engaging musical rendition of Victor Hugo's classic novel of the same name that holds a profound Christian message of love, sacrifice, and redemption.

Set in 1815 in France, a somewhat dark period for those who did not belong to the upper class, *Les Misérables* focuses on Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman), who has just been released from prison after almost 20 years. His original sentence — for stealing a loaf of bread to feed a starving child — was for five years. The rest of the time was for attempting to escape.



But Valjean's imprisonment doesn't seem to end with his release. Because he has to show his prison papers in every town he enters, he is marked as a criminal for life, enduring cruel treatment from the townspeople he encounters. And because he is stigmatized as a social outcast, it is almost impossible for him to find either work or a home.

One man, however, has the good grace to recognize Valjean's desperation and offer him a meal and a warm place to eat: a bishop (Colm Wilkinson). But even in the face of such kindness, Valjean cannot entirely abandon his past ways, and steals the priest's silver plates and cups.

As a criminal who is constantly under surveillance, however, Valjean is quickly captured by authorities, who drag him back to the church and prepare to beat him and send him back to prison.

But then something happens that touches Valjean's heart in a way that forever changes him. The compassionate priest tells the authorities that he had given Valjean the plates and cups, and he even gives him some silver candlesticks as well, whispering to him that he must use the silver to "become an honest man."

The scene gives way to a powerful song by Valjean — virtually a prayer to God for forgiveness and the opportunity for redemption — wherein he admits that he is racked with guilt and determines to become a changed man.

God hears the penitent's prayer and Valjean appears to become an honest man. He destroys the papers that prove his criminal past and uses the silver to buy a business in which he intends to employ the poor.

He keeps his promise to become a better man, and begins to behave like a good Christian who puts the needs of others before himself.

He even agrees to adopt the daughter of a dying woman named Fantine (Anne Hathaway), and he raises the little Cosette (Amanda Seyfried) as his own. Valjean's outward display of kindness toward Fantine is significant in that although she is a pariah who has engaged in such self-destructive acts as to lead to her deathbed, he does not pass judgment. He proves to be full of compassion to her, easing her woes with his promise to care for Cosette.



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After Fantine dies, Valjean finds Cosette in the care of her greedy aunt and uncle, and buys her from them.

And just like that, Valjean is a father. As with any good parent, he finds that Cosette's needs become far more important to him than his own. As Cosette grows older, Valjean is even willing to put his own life on the line for the young man Marius (Eddie Redmayne) with whom Cosette has fallen in love. Marius finds himself in danger as he becomes involved in a plot to overthrow the established order.

The relationship between Cosette and Marius is complicated by another woman named Éponine (Samantha Barks), who loves Marius so much that she makes the ultimate sacrifice for him.

As for Valjean, though he has turned his life around, police inspector Javert (Russell Crowe) is always on the lookout for him since he has broken his parole. Javert is obsessed with seeing that Valjean is brought to justice without regard for his possible transformation; thus, Valjean must always be on the run.

Les Misérables is a film about redemption and sacrifice. There is a variety of different storylines, most of which focus on the personal lives of the characters with the historical period in the backdrop, though never too far away, as it is closely intertwined in with the characters' personal stories.

The film does not shy away from the novel's focus on the Christian theme of redemption, and as such, God is invoked in a number of scenes. The presence of Christian symbols throughout the musical can hardly be missed. Over and over, God's loving grace is discussed and requested, and the film makes a clear statement about the impact of God's absence in one's life.

The production quality of *Les Misérables* is truly unparalleled. The music and singing are enthralling, powerfully capturing the mood of each scene. The voices of the performers do justice to the quality of the music as well as to the story. The costumes are incredibly realistic and appear to be taken right out of artwork from the time period. And the acting is marvelously convincing. Though the film is a long one, the time flies by swiftly.

Fans of the novel should be quite pleased with *Les Misérables* as it does not stray from any of the book's major elements. However, the film it is not ideal for younger audiences as it graphically depicts the depravity of humanity, particularly in the absence of God. These scenes are necessary, however, to create the dichotomy between a world before redemption and one after it.

Overall, *Les Misérables* is a superb and powerful new addition to films this holiday season.

Photo at top showing Hugh Jackman as Jean Valjean (center): AP Images/Universal Pictures



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