

The Beach

'MA' (15+) for violence, strong sexuality, language and drug content

Hollywood Jesus: <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/beach.htm>

IMDB: <http://imdb.com/title/tt0163978/>

Directed by

Danny Boyle

Writing credits

Alex Garland (novel)

John Hodge (screenplay)

Cast overview, first billed only:

Leonardo DiCaprio

Tilda Swinton

Virginie Ledoyen

Guillaume Canet

Robert Carlyle

Paterson Joseph

Lars Arentz-Hansen

Peter Youngblood Hills

Runtime: 119 min

Country: USA / UK

Language: English / French / Swedish / Thai / Serbo-Croatian

Color: Color (Technicolor)

Synopsis

Time magazine termed this movie a 'contemplative action movie, an interior thriller'. It's set on an idyllic island (based on Ko Pha-Ngan island, off the eastern coast of Thailand), with 'beautiful people living in an unruffled commune, the symbiosis of modern man and primal nature'. A group of young peace-loving internationals seek to create paradise (with the help of drugs and sex), free from the problems of western society. They prize community and the pursuit of individual happiness. Leonardo Di Caprio plays the lead role of Richard, an American backpacker looking for adventure, who is given a map to 'the beach', a 'treasure island'. The island is shared with marijuana farmers who go to great lengths to protect their crops and income. But it is Richard's actions that have a devastating impact on the community (reminiscent of 'Lord of the Flies?').

Group discussion

- What are the issues raised in the film?
- What biblical stories and gospel values/truths engage with the film's story?
- What insights do we gain into contemporary society, and the human condition?

Paradise Lost

The film can be seen as a contemporary version of the Garden of Eden. The optimism of the young people on the island to be able to set up an alternative society is shattered. Richard is the outsider in the community, and his presence signals the loss of innocence and the breakdown of friendship, honesty, trust and integrity. Evil is introduced into paradise. There are overt parallels with Richard and the serpent/the devil. Richard arrives in the community wearing an 'el diablo' (the devil) t-shirt; he hisses at a young woman fleeing from a guard in the marijuana fields, resulting in her being shot; he drinks a glass of snake blood; one scene has him peering into a tank of serpents. Rather than working for the common good, Richard satisfies his own desires and lusts.

- In what way does 'evil' penetrate our communities and society? How might 'evil' be recognised and resisted? Can evil be personalised (ie an 'evil' person)?
- Is it possible for humans to create 'paradise'? How, and on what basis? Is the 'fall' inevitable in 'paradise'?

It's a fine line between pleasure and pain

- 'Anyone who goes after pleasure cannot complain when he comes across pain. If you do not want pain, do not go after pleasure either'. (Eknath Easwaran, spiritual teacher).
- Desire is desire wherever you go. The sun will not bleach it, nor the tide wash it away'. (Richard, 'The Beach')
- Mark 8:34-37 (give your life to save it); Matthew 6:19-21 (treasure in heaven)
- The pursuit of pleasure has primacy in western culture. Discuss the statements.

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