

*Braveheart*, Part 1

[James Cordrey](#) , April 2, 2003

Let's start this discussion of *Braveheart* by saying this: It's not a "Christian" movie. In fact, the very idea that something such as a movie would be labeled "Christian" is problematic and should be addressed in a separate essay. Having said that, William Wallace — the Scottish commoner who got drawn into a war with England for the liberation of his people — is a Christ-figure and there are Biblical similarities in the film, as well as truths that are powerfully depicted. The film can be — even, should be — inspirational and instructive to followers of Christ.

Wallace is a Warrior-Poet, a phrase that appears at the very end of the film as a description of the fighting men of Scotland. In watching his interactions throughout the film, we see Wallace is the kind of man other men long to be. No doubt many would feel I have overstated the case. However, throughout the film and history itself, men have followed other men who were cut from the same cloth as Wallace. The Earl of Bruce, the rightful heir to the Scottish throne is a man who, when he meets Wallace in the film, tries to resist following him. Yet as the story unfolds, the Bruce admits he longs to fight as Wallace does, and is captivated by Wallace's passion and purpose.

The extent to which Wallace is a Christ-figure also includes the concept of the Warrior-Poet, since Jesus was also one during his time on earth. Furthermore, He will be again in His second coming. A Warrior-Poet is a man who knows how to fight evil in favor of truth and what is right, but also nurtures relational intimacy and values beauty (see Psalm 45). In fact, in God's design of man, the full intention was for men to live out their calling and identity as Warrior-Poets. Certainly, "Warrior-Poet" appears nowhere in scripture. Nevertheless, when God told Adam to rule over the earth, and gave him Eve, God was displaying for us that Man would be a warrior who would rule the earth and subdue it, but he would also be a relational being designed to have intimacy with Woman.

It would be wrong to attempt to exegete every scene and every line of dialogue in *Braveheart* looking for a Biblical equivalent. The film is a work of art and should be treated as such. Like all great stories or epic tales, *Braveheart* speaks to us about a greater reality than simple existence, and it tells us something about ourselves — what's truly valuable and what is worth fighting for in life. The film cannot be dismissed — as a co-worker of mine did — as a macho movie; it is much larger than that. Macho is a guy driving a monster truck with huge tires who never takes the vehicle off-road. Macho is a man posturing to impress others with his own "greatness" in strength or intellect. Macho is world wrestling and all the false accoutrements which are thereby associated. Macho is a lie.

*Braveheart*, on the other hand, is a combination of strength and beauty, not revealed in for their own sakes, but understood in light of a larger reality. There is battle, but there is deep wisdom. Force is used redemptively, to fight for what is truly good and right. It's more than the harsh reality of 13th Century warfare. The film stirs the soul to something true: That we live in a battle, a fallen world, but there are such things as truth, honor, freedom, courage, and sincere love. In fact, it is precisely because we live in a fallen world where Good and Evil are at war that the virtues of truth, honor, freedom, courage, and love are important.

The story affirms an age-old truth passed on in legends and myths: That a good man in pursuit of what is right is dangerous to those who would practice evil and live for nothing other than selfish gain. In Wallace we see a picture of authentic masculinity, and ultimately, we see that in Christ himself.

Before the first open-field conflict between the Scots and England's Northern Army at Stirling, Wallace delivers a rousing speech. Amidst crumbling morale due to the nobles' inability to capture and motivate the hearts of the Scots, Wallace appeals to the very deep places of their souls. Wallace asks the men if they will fight for freedom, only to get the answer that they would rather run and live than fight and possibly die. Undeterred, Wallace says, "Fight and you may die. Run and you'll live, at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, you would give every day from that day to this for one chance — just one chance — to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom." Wallace knows something of these men; he knows something of what makes them tick. And he knows that deep in the heart of every man is a desire to rise to the challenges of life and fight the battles which ought to be fought. It is universal that no man can stand to be called a coward, to be identified with running away from something he knows he should have faced. And it is precisely because Wallace faced head-on the situation before him, despite great odds, that he was worth following.

The speech at Stirling is very reminiscent of Christ's words in Luke 9:24-25: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Again, not in a line-by-line dissection, but in theme, Wallace is saying that the attempt to run away and save your own life does not lead to freedom, it ends up being a life unworth living — something intolerable in the deep places of a man's heart.