

Want a Sneak Peek at Burnett's 'Son of God' Film?

Liberty University students got a special treat at Monday's convocation service as they were shown clips from the upcoming film *Son of God* by its producers, Mark Burnett and Roma Downey.

Johnnie Moore, senior vice president for communications, introduced the married couple, calling them the "prototypical image of people who are excellent at their craft and yet committed to their faith."

Downey, an Emmy-nominated actress, is best known for her recurring role on the television program *Touched by an Angel*. Burnett, a five-time Emmy winner, has been credited with starting the reality television phenomenon. He is the creator of hit shows such as "*Survivor*," "*The Voice*," "*The Apprentice*," "*Shark Tank*" and, with his wife, *The Bible*. He has produced more than 2,400 hours of programming that air regularly in more than 70 countries. He has also been named to *Forbes'* list of the world's 100 most influential celebrities.

Burnett and Downey have been producing together for five years. Burnett said they decided to leverage their voice in Hollywood to put the Bible on primetime TV.

"We have a big platform with what we do for a living," Burnett said. "So we have a chance to say a lot about the love of Jesus and our love for Him. ... [But] you still have to be really good at your craft; just being Christian doesn't make it OK to make bad content."

After the global success of *The Bible* miniseries on the History Channel last spring (viewed by more than 100 million people), the couple re-edited episodes featuring Jesus and added more footage to create a major motion picture: *Son of*

God, which opens in theaters Feb. 28. The film will also be released in Spanish and Korean.

"We knew that the footage that we had on the life of Jesus was so extraordinary that it deserved its own big-screen moment," Downey said. "Jesus has not been on the big screen in 10 years, so there is a whole generation of young people who have not had an opportunity to go to the theater and see the life of our Savior on the big screen."

The couple shared two scenes, a music video and a trailer from the film.

Downey also shared stories from the set, illustrating how God was working behind the scenes in the creation of the miniseries and film.

"This whole project began with prayer," she said. "It came in on a whisper in our hearts to make this series, and we prayed on it."

Burnett said they wanted to provide a fresh visual reference point for young people to experience the Bible, similar to how the *10 Commandments* and the *Jesus* film did for previous generations.

He said that while Christ calls Christians to be as harmless as doves and as wise as serpents, Christians today tend to embrace the former and forget the latter. He challenged Liberty students to strive for excellence and become the next generation of Christian leaders.

"It is never easy, and there are no guarantees of the outcome. ... You just have to pray and have faith," he said. "But remember, just praying and having faith and staying on the couch isn't going to help you. ... You have to be willing to take risks. Get off that couch and do something with that education."

Burnett said Liberty is a great training ground for budding talent. "The fact that you are at Liberty means you are so advantaged, as your minds are being trained for leadership and your hearts are being trained for service," he said to the students.

During the convocation service, Downey and Burnett announced for the first time a competition to create a movie trailer for *Son of God*. They said submissions should be mock political campaign ads. The competition is open to anyone, and the winner will be flown to Hollywood for a VIP experience with Downey and Burnett. For more information or to download movie clips and music for submissions, visit .

Burnett also thanked Dr. Randall Price, professor and executive director of Liberty's Center for Judaic Studies, for providing some rare artifacts from biblical times for the Bible Experience. The artifacts were on display March 19-27 in New York City as a celebration of the DVD release for *The Bible*.

After convocation, the couple took time to interact with students and take pictures with them.

Later in the day, the couple toured Liberty's Cinematic Arts, Zaki Gordon Center and then held a Q&A with film students, where they shared their years of knowledge and experience with budding filmmakers.

"As a Christian, you have to make your product as good as something as it appears in the secular world," Burnett told the students. "You need to take risks. Who knows what happens when *Son of God* comes out? We hope it does well, but we are not sure. If you do not want to risk, then do not play. You are responsible for the emotional connection. If you cannot connect to someone on a screen, then you are in the wrong business."

Downey emphasized her hope that projects like *The Bible* and

Son of God bring the gospel to the forefront of mainstream conversation.

“The opportunity with a movie like this that is so clearly about the Lord Jesus,” she said, “you cannot help but be humbled and feeling so special because of the love that comes off the screen.”