



CINEMA *Shepherd*

with the



Viewing Guide - City Lights

(1931)

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY:

"City Lights begins with an uproarious skewering of pomp, formality, and politicians, ends with one of the most famous last shots in movie history and, from start to finish, so completely touches the heart and tickles the funny bone that in 2006 it was named #11 among the American Film Institute's Top-100 American Films. "Talkies" were well entrenched when Charles Chaplin swam against the filmmaking tide with this forever classic that's silent except for music and sound effects. The story, involving the Tramp's attempts to get money for an operation that will restore sight to a blind flower girl, provides the star with an ideal framework for sentiment and laughs. The Tramp is variously a street sweeper, a boxer, a rich poseur, and a rescuer of a suicidal millionaire. His message is unspoken, but universally understood: love is blind." [Mk2 DVD Version of City Lights, 2003]

The film is made in the historical context of increasingly heartless cities, heartless Wall Street, and the beginning of a new era of "socially-engaged" cinema that began with the German filmmaker Fritz Lang's Metropolis.

CAST:

Charlie Chaplin	A Tramp
Virginia Cherrill	A Flower Girl
Harry Myers	An Eccentric Millionaire
Writer	Charles Chaplin
Original Music	Charles Chaplin
Film Editing	Charles Chaplin
Director	Charles Chaplin

"Hold fast to *hope*, a sure and steadfast *anchor* of the soul."
Heb. 6:18-19

TRIVIA:

- Orson Welles, director of Citizen Kane (and Bishop Bullock agrees!) has said that this was his favorite movie of all time.
- Charles Chaplin re-shot the scene in which the Little Tramp first meets the blind flower-girl and buys a flower from her 342 times, as he could not find a satisfactory way of showing that the blind flower-girl thought that the mute tramp was wealthy.
- In terms of years, this film was Charles Chaplin's longest undertaking. It was in production from 31 December 1927 - 22 January 1931, over three years. It shot for only 180 days, though.
- At the beginning of the film, a town official and a woman dedicating the statue can be heard uttering nondescript words by way of a paper reed mouth instrument. The sounds were made by Charles Chaplin and this was the first time that his voice was heard on film.

QUOTES:

James Agee, about the final scene of the film: “[It is] the greatest piece of acting and the highest moment in movies.”

Virginia Cherrill, actress, the flower girl: “Charlie never liked me and I never liked Charlie.”

Opening Credits: “A Comedy Romance in Pantomime.”

Woody Allen: “My favorite of his [Chaplin’s] films is, of course, *City Lights*, because I thought it said more about love, than so many pictures that prattle on about love.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What did you think about the film *City Lights*?
2. What is the meaning of the title chosen for the film by Charles Chaplin?
3. What advantages does a silent film have over a talking film?
4. Chaplin said that he set out to make a film about “blindness.” What does the film say about blindness? Who is blind and about what are they blind?
5. Jesus said, “there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13) What does the film say about love? How can a mostly silent film “say” more about love than a talking picture?
6. What does the film say about friendship as we watch the “on-again, off-again” friendship between the tramp and the millionaire?
7. How does this film speak louder than words?
8. How is hope restored in this hopeless city, where the poverty of the two main characters renders them degraded and dismissed?
9. What makes the final scene so moving, so memorable?
10. Would you recommend *City Lights* or not?