



The King's Speech

Rated R. Our Ratings: V-1; L-8; S/N -1 Running time: 1 hour 51 min.

But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

Exodus 4:10-12

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

1 John 4:17-18

Normally the story of a stammerer overcoming his speech handicap would be just a personal one, but director Tom Hooper's film takes on historical significance because the stammerer is Prince Albert, the Duke of York (Colin Firth), second in line to the British throne. We first see him trying to deliver a speech at the opening of a sporting event in the mid-Twenties. We are relieved when, after a halting beginning, the film jumps ahead a number of years. His supportive wife Elizabeth (Helen Bonham Carter) visits speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), whose office is located in the living room of his home—it must be the drabest such room in London, indeed, in all of England. She does not give the real name, either of herself or her husband. The first session does not go well, Lionell insisting that for his unorthodox methods to work, the two must become friends, using each other's first names. The Duke, very class conscious, does not like this idea at all, and when Lionell records him reading a portion of Shakespeare while playing music loudly, he walks out. Fortunately, the Duke does take the recording with him, even though he refused to listen to it.

Sometime later he does listen to the record and is surprised to hear himself reading the passage without stuttering. Soon he is back at Lionell's office, gradually giving in to the therapist's regimen. Now knowing the identity of his patient, Lionell calls him by his nickname, Bertie, and has him engaging in what seems like silly exercises (makes us think of the training sequence in the two Karate Kid movies), dancing around, and repeating filthy words over and over (which is what gives the film its rating). One of the many touches of humor in the film is when Lionell asks, "Do you know the 'f' word?" and Albert, ever the person of genteel breeding, responds, "Ffff... fornication?" The therapist continues to press the reluctant "Bertie" on personal issues of his past, believing that some past fear lies at the base of his stammering, and noting that when he deliberately gets the Duke upset, he is able to get a sentence out without stammering.

Meanwhile, older brother Edward is carrying on an affair with a American divorcee Wallave Simpson, much to the scandal of their father King George VI and the Government. When the old man dies, Edward decides that he "cannot govern without the woman I love." To his horror Bertie will accede to the throne. Bad enough in ordinary times, but Europe is succumbing to the forces of Adolf Hitler, and some in the government, lead by Winston Churchill, know that Britain will go to war with Germany. This is a grim time when the nation needs a calm leader with a commanding voice that can instill hope and confidence in their future.

How the new King George VI and Bertie (with Elizabeth's support) meet the many obstacles ahead, including an unexpected one that could have destroyed their relationship, makes for viewing as thrilling to the viewer as any computer-enhanced fictional action movie. What a superb cast, fully convincing us that we are eye-witnesses to history. Historical drama, infused richly with personal details, does not get any better than this film, well deserving of all the Oscar talk surrounding it.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. What did you think of the attempts of the first speech therapist to cure the Duke of his stammering. How did his mechanical approach fail to deal with the root cause, something which Lionell understood well.
2. How does Lionell apparently understand the Scripture claim that "perfect love casts out fear"? How is his insistence that their relationship be, not of therapist-patient, but friend-friend? What does the Duke have to overcome for this to happen?
3. Why is speech so important for a leader, as Moses apparently thinks?
4. As can be seen by events within the British royal family, the strict rules regarding marriage and divorce have been relaxed. What do you think about this, an improvement or not?