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Actor who plays Jesus in 'Ben-Hur' reveals what it was like to portray Christ — and film the crucifixion scene


By Billy Hallowell | Aug 19, 2016, 1:00pm MDT

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From left, actors Jack Huston, Toby Kebbell, producer Roma Downey, Rodrigo Santoro and Morgan Freeman pose for the press during the world premiere of "Ben-Hur" at the Teatro Metropolitan in Mexico City, Tuesday, Aug. 9, 2016. | Nick Wagner, AP

Actor Rodrigo Santoro, who plays Jesus in the new "Ben-Hur" movie, recently revealed what it was like to prepare for the epic role, calling it an "inspiring, unforgettable journey."



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FlickDirect's Judith Raymer recently asked Santoro and fellow actor Jack Huston, who plays Judah Ben-Hur, where they drew from "for the depth of humility" that they needed to embody their respective roles, and Santoro was candid.

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"We are talking about a character who's bigger than life," Santoro said of Jesus. "I researched a lot from films, literature, paintings, gospels, and what I found out is that the point that unifies, that is common to all the references were his heart, love ... he was a loving human being."

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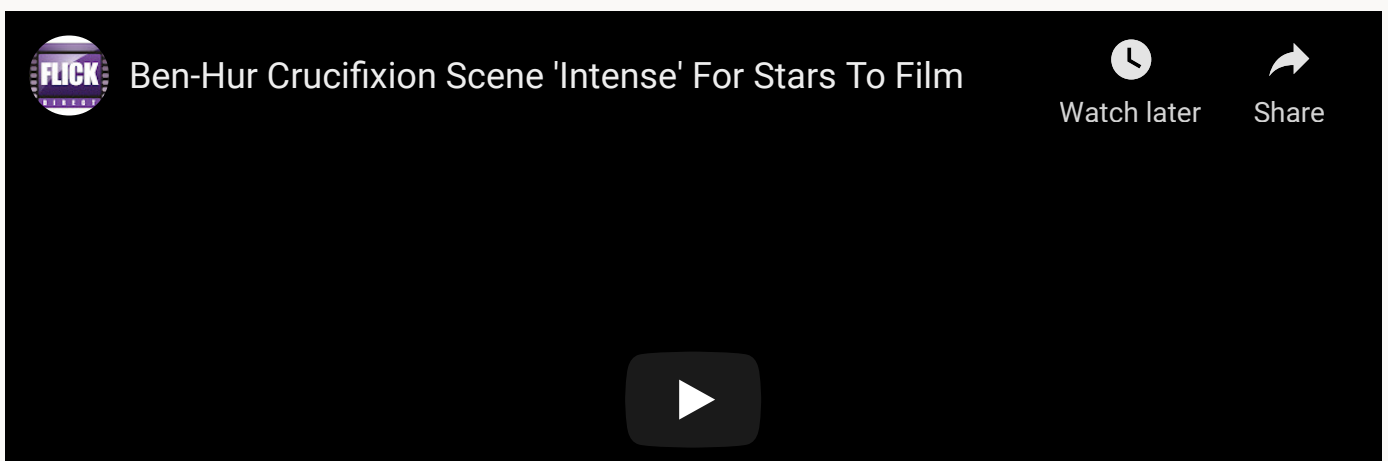
While the actor said that love is the common-sense theme that emerges when exploring the life of Jesus, he explained his own personal quest of looking deep within himself to try to replicate the intense, unending and unceasing love that Jesus displays in the gospels.

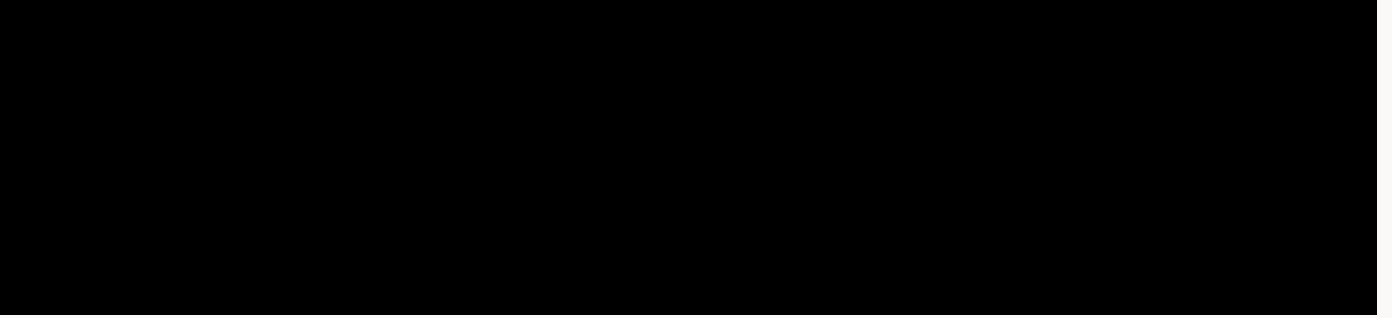
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Santoro said that his human limitations made that journey quite fascinating.

"It was an intimate, spiritual, transforming, inspiring, unforgettable journey," he said. "And I just tried to do it with my heart."

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Huston also discussed preparing for his role as Judah Ben-Hur, a fictional character who Paramount Pictures describes as "a prince falsely accused of treason by his adopted brother Messala, an officer in the Roman army."

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As a result of this betrayal, Ben-Hur finds himself on a years-long journey of retribution that inevitably culminates in a profound tale of forgiveness and love.

"It was very much a journey internal for me as an actor as much as it was when reading the script," Huston said, explaining that Ben-Hur's move from anger to forgiveness was instructive. "I was learning things every day about the character."

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One of the most intense scenes in the film is Jesus' crucifixion — a moment that Huston described as incredibly "powerful" to film.

And there's a moment in that scene during which Ben-Hur and Jesus lock eyes, with Huston saying that the reaction to that snippet in the film among viewers has been profound, with people purportedly being stirred by the emotive experience.

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Santoro, who quipped about how cold it was while he was on the cross, said on a more serious note that putting the emotional experience into words is difficult.

"It's one of those moments that I will never be able to describe and be fair to what I felt," he said. "The experience transcends giving your craft as an artist. It goes much beyond that."

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"Ben-Hur," which releases on Aug. 19, was executive produced by Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, the husband and wife duo who also created "The Bible" series and "A.D.," among other popular television shows and feature films.



Burnett has also been behind big TV hits like "The Voice" and "Survivor," with Downey starring in the once-popular show "Touched by an Angel," which concluded in 2003 after nine seasons.

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Downey told Deseret News National earlier this summer about the power of

personal transformation that she sees inherent in the storyline of "Ben-Hur."

"We see a man who has been brought to his knees, empty and angry, filled with the desire for revenge," she said. "Then, through an encounter with Jesus, he is forever changed. It's profoundly moving."

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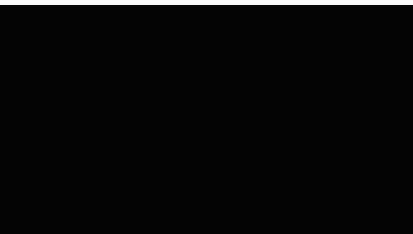
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