

Dallas Buyers Club (2013)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 57 min..

Our advisories: Violence 3; Language 6; Sex/Nudity 5.

Star rating (1-5): 3

*Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.*

Proverbs 31:8

The nearly impossible is pulled off by the excellent cast and director Jean-Marc Vallée and screenwriter Craig Borten & Melisa Wallack—they bring us around to root for and then to like a despicable man in this story based on a real life person. Ron Woodroof (Matthew McConaughey) is a full time electrician employed by the oil industry and a part-time rodeo clown and bull rider. Our first glimpse of him shows that he has the morals of an alley cat. He should be out in the arena ready to lure the bull away from a rider, but instead is in a dark corner humping not one, but two groupies. He drinks and takes drugs at night with his buddies and engages in sex with any woman willing to leave the bar for a one-night stand.

Then comes the wake up call at a Dallas hospital where he has been taken following an accident on the job. Two physicians, Dr. Eve Saks (Jennifer Garner) and Dr. Sevard (Dennis O'Hare) break the news to him that he is HIV positive. He has thirty days to live. Going into angry denial, he curses them and storms out of the hospital. But as his physical condition worsens, he reads up on the disease and discovers that there is an unapproved drug AZT designed to treat the ailment. The doctors inform him that it is being tested, and that even if he could get into the program, there is no guarantee that he would receive the drug, half the group receiving instead a

placebo. Again he angrily leaves, but soon is able to buy the pills from a friendly hospital orderly.

In the meantime he finds himself alienated from his buddies who, upon learning of his affliction, presume that he is “a faggot”—this story takes place in the mid-1980s when many thought that AIDs could be spread through handshakes. Ironically, he soon is allied with a member of the hated group, a transvestite named Rayon (Jared Leto) whom he had rejected when the two had met at the hospital. Rayon possesses as strong a will to survive as Ron, so for convenience sake the two form an uneasy partnership, she/he introducing Ron to the Dallas gay scene.

When Ron’s drug supply from the hospital is cut off, he journeys to Mexico where shady Dr. Vass (Griffin Dunne) runs a clinic dispensing cocktails of drugs and nutrients said to help AIDs patients. He also travels to Amsterdam, Japan and Israel to buy the latest advances in AIDS drugs. Ron decides to cash in on the need of the Dallas gay community by traveling back and forth with cache’s of drugs, posing as a priest in order to get through customs. He soon is being dogged FDA official Richard Barkley (Michael O’Neill) who would love to make Ron a guest of the federal penal system.

To get around the law, Ron and Rayon borrow an idea from gay groups in other cities, that of selling memberships in a buying club and giving away the drugs as a perk of membership. Soon there are long lines outside their office in a run-down motel. Ron continues in his old homophobic ways, and then slowly begins to change. His relationship with Rayon is a stormy one, and yet, as he is exposed to her plight and that of hundreds of other gay men and women, his hardened, prejudiced heart begins to soften. By the time Agent Barkely is close to shutting down his operation, Ron is fighting not just for his own survival, but is as concerned for that of his clients as well.

Ron also has brought over to his side Dr. Eve Saks, who to the best of her ability argues against the cruel policy of denying aid to Ron's clientele. Ron Woodroof is about as transformed a person by the end of the film as can be found in the character transformation genre of film. And he has lived years beyond the date that Dr. Sevard had predicted he would live. Although the language and morals of the characters will be offensive to people of faith, this is a film well worth watching and discussing. I do not know if Matthew McConaughey's dedication to his role—his extremely gaunt look was achieved by a strict diet that shed 30 or so pounds of his muscular flesh—will earn him an Oscar nod, given the dark side of the character, but he certainly deserves the Oscar buzz he is receiving. Nor do I know what the cosmic fate for Ron Woodroof will be, but I do know that in many ways he fulfilled Jesus' words in Matthew 25, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

The full review with a set of questions for reflection or discussion will appear in the December issue of Visual Parables, which will be available late in November.

You can also check more details about [Ron Woodroof](#), the founder of Dallas Buyers Club, at the website Alchetron.