

How The Good Guys Win

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[0 : 00] Okay, well I want to start by doing a little survey and I want you to put up your hands if you like Harry Potter. Okay, good. We've got more on this side than that side.

Okay, but definitely a big Harry Potter crowd here. Oh, wow. Okay, thanks. It's snacks for my sermon. Okay, we've got some Harry Potter fans.

Okay, what about, let's go a little older, what about Star Wars? Okay, okay. Still a little bit boring this side. We've got a lot of stuff here. Maybe I'll go a little bit older in terms at least of when it was written.

Who has read or watched Lord of the Rings or The Hobbit? Anyone? Okay. Much more cultured this side of the church than this side, but it's okay. It's okay.

Well, even if you haven't or you don't like these stories, they are undoubtedly the most popular stories of our time. And what makes them popular is that they're actually, if you know anything about these stories, they are the same story just told in different ways.

[1 : 07] Whether it's with lightsabers or with wands or with swords that glow blue when orcs are close, all of these stories actually tell the story of a great struggle between evil and good.

And they have the same elements. There's a villain, there's a hero, and good wins in the end. And we never get tired of these stories, whether it's in this age or whether it's in the ancient world with Beowulf and Odyssey and all of their legends.

It's always the same story, this great struggle between good and evil. And there's something about these stories that stick with us. As Sam Gamgee says, they are the great stories that stay with you, even if you are too small to understand why.

Well, today I want to tell you why we love these stories so much, about this struggle between good and evil. And the reason is because we're in one.

We are in a great story. Whether you realize it or not, we are all part of a great story. And the Bible, one of the major things the Bible does is it reveals to us that we are part of this big story and where we fit in.

[2 : 25] That's why we love coming to church and hearing the Bible. Because we are all part of this epic struggle between good and evil that God has been writing since the beginning of creation.

And the plots of the stories we write and read and watch on TV, the great ones, like these ones behind me, the plots of these are actually just copies of the one true story that we all are part of, that we're all in.

Now there's a scene in all of these great stories where the hero arrives. Right? You might know that scene in your favorite story. The hero arrives to confront the villain, whether it's Luke Skywalker coming to the Death Star to confront the evil galactic emperor, or whether it's Frodo and Sam going to Mount Doom to confront the power of Sauron, or whether it's Harry Potter confronting Voldemort. These are all, when the hero arrives, that's all a vital part of the story. Well, do you know it's the same in the one true story that we're part of? There's a moment in our story when the hero arrives to confront the villain, and it's at Christmas.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. That's where Christmas fits in to the one true story, because it's the scene where the hero arrives. But it doesn't seem that way, does it?

[3 : 58] If you think about Christmas, the little baby, you know, he didn't come as a powerful Jedi or a skilled wizard, but as this helpless baby in a manger.

And yet, what the Bible reveals to us is that the arrival of this baby began the downfall of the greatest villain the world has ever known. And this Christmas, we're going to find out why by looking for the next few minutes at what happened in heaven when Jesus came to earth.

What happened in heaven when Jesus came to earth? Now, we know what happened on earth. I'm sure you know. You've been to church enough times at Christmas time to know what happened on earth. You know the nativity scenes, except the one with the dragon, which is ours, which is slightly different.

But you know the story, right? The virgin going to Bethlehem, no room at the inn, baby gets born in the stable, three wise men. No, not the three.

The wise men, unspecified number of. So we know what happened on earth. But you know that's only half the story. Do you know all of the stuff that you know about Christmas, that stuff that happened on earth, is only half the story?

[5 : 09] Because there is another realm. We don't see it, but there is another realm. The heavenly realm, where God and supernatural creatures dwell.

We can't see that realm. And if it wasn't for the Bible, we wouldn't know much about it at all. But what the Bible does, and this is one of the things I love about the Bible, is that it pulls back the curtain, especially the book of Revelation, which is the book we read from, the last book of the Bible.

What it does is it pulls back the curtain to give us a glimpse of the other side, to give us a glimpse of what's happening in heaven. And Revelation 12, this chapter that we're looking at this morning, specifically tells us what happened in heaven, when Jesus came to earth.

And it's pretty scary. So, yesterday we looked at episode 1, which is the first few verses of Revelation 12. If you weren't here yesterday, I'll just give you a quick summary.

There's this glorious figure of a woman, and she's pregnant, she's about to give birth, but then there's this ferocious seven-headed dragon, that prepares to eat her child, her baby, the moment it's born.

[6 : 21] It's all very weird and crazy, but it's a symbol. You see, when we read in Revelation, we're reading about symbols that describe these heavenly realities we can't see.

So, this is a symbol describing the forces at play when Jesus was born, the things you couldn't see, but were real in the spiritual realm, in the heavenly realm, when Jesus was born. And this dragon wanting to eat the child actually came out in real life, in literally, when Herod, King Herod, wanted to kill the babies, when Jesus was born, because he heard about Jesus.

This is the part of the Christmas story, by the way, we don't often hear. There was this massacre of the babies in Bethlehem in the southern towns, because Herod was jealous that this king was born. And so, so many babies died, and that happened.

But what we realize when we read Revelation, is that it wasn't just Herod. There was this evil force behind him, this villain, who was wanting to destroy the child, the dragon, that inspired Herod to do the evil things he did.

But, of course, the dragon fails, and Joseph and Mary manage to escape. They get warned by the wise men, because they're wise men. They get warned to escape, and they escape to Egypt, so Herod can't get them.

[7 : 33] And so the dragon fails. And so now, we get to episode two of the saga, and we see what happens next. And what we see in the next few verses from verse seven, is the fall of the dragon.

That's what we're going to look at. The fall of the dragon. Let me read to you from verse seven of Revelation 12. Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, but he could not prevail. And there was no place for them in heaven any longer. So, the great dragon was thrown out.

The ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and his angels with him.

Okay, so now in this verse, it's very important. Episode two reveals to us the identity of the dragon, who he really is. He is the devil or Satan.

[8 : 32] Now, you've probably all heard about the devil. Okay? Many people think he's just a made-up mythological figure to scare children to be good. But, when we read the Bible, we realize he's real.

He's not just a made-up figure in stories. He's a real creature in the heavenly realm. He doesn't have horns and a pitchfork, like we often see pictures of him.

But, who really is he? If he's real, who is this devil? Well, his names are actually very important. His names give us a clue to who he really is.

And so, Satan, that's his one name, means adversary. It means opponent. Because, he has been always the ancient opponent of God's plans.

He has always been the heavenly creature that wants God's plans not to work. God's good plans. Because God has good plans for this world. But, there's this creature, this heavenly creature, who doesn't want those plans to succeed.

[9 : 39] And, he is bent on ruining God's world. And, if you want proof that he exists, just look around. Because, when we look around in our world, we realize he's actually really good at what he does.

There is a villain in our story. And, he's real. There is a real villain in our story. And, he is the ultimate villain. He makes Voldemort look like a Sunday school teacher.

Because, he is the villain that is behind all the other villains in our story. Just like he was behind Herod in the Christmas story. But, that's also why reading Revelation 12 is so amazing.

Because, for the first time in history, he is taken down. The villain is taken down. And, all because this little baby has been born.

Isn't that amazing? The villain is taken down because a little baby is born. But, how does that work? How does a baby being born take down the seven-headed dragon villain that is behind all the villains of the world?

[10 : 48] Well, that's what we're going to look at next. How does a baby defeat a dragon? Have you ever wondered? Well, we find out in the next few verses. I'm going to read from verse 10. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have now come because the accuser of our brothers and sisters who accuses them before our God day and night has been thrown down.

They conquered Him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

Okay, so this dragon we read in the Bible was conquered by the blood of the Lamb? That's very weird. How can a lamb conquer a dragon?

A lamb is a pretty weak animal. Anybody played with a lamb or touched a lamb or petted a lamb maybe in a farm or one of those petting zoos? Now, is it a very scary animal?

No? That's a pretty tame weak animal. Now, if you put, boys and girls, if you put a lamb in a ring with a dragon, who would win? The dragon, right?

[12 : 05] There would be some lamb chops that day. Okay, a lamb. But now, we also read that it's the blood of the lamb so this lamb was already killed. I mean, a living lamb doesn't have a chance against a dragon.

How can a dead lamb take down a dragon? Very strange, isn't it? Well, we've got to understand in the Bible, a lamb is actually a sacrificial animal.

And in the New Testament of the Bible, lamb is used to describe the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, when he died on the cross. And so, this is not just any lamb it's talking about.

It's talking about when Jesus died, the ultimate sacrifice that all of those Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. And it's saying that when Jesus died on earth, that was the very thing, that was the very moment that Satan's power was broken in heaven.

The moment Jesus died on earth. And that is why Jesus came. To die. That is why he was born. And he knew it. Let me read to you how he describes, he's trying to convince his disciples, guys, I've come to this earth so that I can die this death on the cross.

[13 : 13] And they don't believe him. And he describes it to them, I'm just going to read to you from John 12. He says this, Now is the time that the ruler of this world will be cast out.

As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself. He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.

But did you hear that? He, when he was talking about his death, he says, now the ruler of this world, talking about the devil, will be cast down. He knew that his death was going to do something in heaven.

His death, Jesus knew, was going to be the secret weapon against the villain. You know, the heroes always have a secret weapon, don't they? Well, Jesus' secret weapon that the villain didn't know about was his death.

It's a very strange secret weapon, isn't it? How does a death defeat a villain? How does Jesus dying take down the villain? Well, to find that out, we need to understand Satan's other name.

[14:14] I told you his first name, well, Satan, the one name, he's known by a lot of names, Satan is one of them, but there's another name he's known by, and it's a name that describes where his power actually comes from, where his power in this world comes from, and it's the name the devil.

You know what devil means? It means the one who accuses, the accuser. I wonder when I was reading this story, or when Dylan was reading it earlier, I wonder if you asked yourself, wait a minute, what's the devil doing in heaven in the first place?

It's a decent question, isn't it? Because that's where we find him in this story. He's in heaven. Well, to understand that, you see, you need to know something about heaven. Now, heaven's an amazing place.

It's where God, who made all the amazing things on earth, dwells. So it must be super amazing, and we know a little bit about that realm, heavenly realm, from the Bible, but there's something else about heaven, along with all these other amazing things, and it is the place, it is the central place in all the universe, where justice is found.

Right? We all love justice, don't we? Boys and girls, if your brother gets a sweet and you don't, that's unfair, that's unjust, and you're going to make it known, because justice must be done. Well, sometimes, and often on earth, justice is not done, but in heaven, justice is always done.

[15:38] You see, heaven is like the central courtroom of the universe, where truth is always known, and it's always fair, and justice is always done, where God dwells. And it's so fair in heaven, it's so just, that even Satan is allowed to speak, and to bring accusations against all the humans who break God's law.

Even Satan is allowed a chance to speak in heaven, because that's how fair it is. And what Satan realized early on, was that's all he ever needs to do, to stop God's good plans for this world.

He just needs to tempt humans to sin, which turns out is not that hard at all, and then make sure that it condemns us in heaven. And that's all he's been doing.

And he's been doing it since the beginning of creation, and it works every time. He's just going to make sure humans sin, and make sure that they're condemned in heaven for that. He's the ultimate tattletale.

You know what I mean, nobody likes a tattletale at school. It's that kid who always goes and rats out on what you've done to the teacher. Who likes that kid?

[16:48] No one likes that kid. But imagine there's a tattletale who doesn't only rat out on you when you do something wrong, but he makes it his mission to make you do something wrong. And he's always following you around at school, and he wants to trip you up, and he wants to make you do something wrong, and the moment you do, he's going to go run off to the teacher and tell you.

And the teacher knows that he's doing that, but the teacher still has to punish you because you did something wrong. Well, you know that tattletale? That's what the devil has been doing to humans since the beginning.

He's the ultimate tattletale, and it works every time. But you know what? God knew that about the devil, and he has always had a plan to stop him from doing that.

And his plan, his secret plan, a mystery hidden for ages, the prophets say, that no one knew about, was for Jesus to come and die.

The secret weapon. Because what the devil didn't know, you see, the devil thought it was great when he saw Jesus getting arrested. And even when Jesus was born, the devil said, well, that was stupid, now I can kill him, now he's in my realm.

[18:01] And so the devil actually inspired Judas to betray Jesus, and he was part of Jesus dying. What he didn't know that whole time is that when Jesus died, that was going to break his power, because when Jesus died, because of who Jesus is, the sinless Son of God, he is able to take the punishment for the sins of other people.

He is the only person who can do that. And that was unique about him, and the devil didn't know that. That Jesus could take the punishment of other people's sins when he died on the cross, so that all who trust in him can't be accused in the courtroom of heaven anymore, because their price has been paid for all their sins.

And that is why from that moment when Jesus died, Satan, when he was in heaven and he realized what was going on, and Michael and all the angels turned to him, now his time is up.

Because up until now, God's been holding them back. No, give him a chance to speak. Michael, Satan's allowed to be here. He's allowed to accuse people if they break the law. And Michael and

the angels have been wanting to get at him, wanting to get at him, but they couldn't. But now, the moment Jesus died, God says, okay guys, okay boys, have at him. He's yours. And they're unleashed, and they fight him, and they kick him out of heaven, and he's cast down to earth. [19 : 22] The villain is cast down. But one more thing we need to see before we finish this morning is something that makes sure that his defeat carries on in every generation since then.

And it's in verse 11. Let me read it to you again. They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives to the point of death. The word of their testimony. Notice that it's not just the Lamb who defeats Satan. It's not just Jesus who defeats him, but God's people, all of God's people who trust in Jesus from that moment on. Defeat the Satan, defeat the devil when they tell others about Jesus. And other people in every generation believe Jesus and trust in him.

That keeps taking Satan's power away to accuse people, and he hates it. Every generation. There are Christians, there are churches like this. Even though Satan doesn't want them and Satan's going to make it difficult, he hates this because when people talk about Jesus and people believe, that is taking away his power, the only power he's ever had to accuse.

[20 : 45] But of course, that's not going to be easy for Christians in every generation because Satan is on earth. And so he makes it hard, and that is why verse 11 says it requires sacrifice. It says, for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

These Christians who tell people about Jesus. Sacrifice. That means being willing to give up what is necessary to tell others the story about Jesus.

And Christians have to give up things every generation to do that. Reputation in school or the office. Money to fund missionaries to go tell the gospel to people who haven't heard it yet.

And sometimes Christians will have to give up their lives to do that. And Satan will make sure it's hard, and yet their willingness to sacrifice like Jesus had is what ultimately defeats the villain.

And I want you to remember that. The willingness to sacrifice is what defeats the villain. It's the one thing the devil can't handle. And if you think about it, isn't that how all the great stories end?

[21 : 52] Isn't that how evil is defeated in all the great stories? Through sacrifice of the hero. whether it's Frodo making the arduous journey to Mount Doom or Luke Skywalker giving himself up to the Galactic Emperor or Harry Potter taking on Voldemort.

I'm not allowed to say anything more apparently because it's a spoiler. But in all the great stories, that is how evil ends up being defeated. Through sacrifice.

and it makes sense because that's how evil is defeated in the one true story that God has written. The question I want to ask you is have you believed that story yet?

The one true story that we are all part of. Have you believed what Jesus came to earth to do? To die for your sins so that if you trust in him the price has been paid and you cannot be accused in heaven any longer.

And if you do believe that if you have trusted in him then I want to leave you with one thought. Will you be willing to make the sacrifices necessary to tell others that story?

[23 : 10] Because when you're willing to do that then you will be playing your part in the great story to bring about the ultimate defeat of evil.

But to find out more about how to be involved in that come back next Sunday as we look at episode 3. Well let me pray for us. Oh Lord we thank you for your Bible that as we open it up we see things that we could never see with our own eyes.

We learn about the heavenly realm and what was going on there when Jesus came to earth. Lord thank you for giving us this other side of Christmas that we know where we fit into the big story. And Lord we thank you that Jesus came to die for our sins and to break Satan's power to accuse us in heaven. Lord I pray that those who don't know and don't trust Jesus yet would this Christmas time think deeply about who he is and what he's done for them.

That they would start reading the gospel stories and learn about him and trust in him so that Satan's power can be broken in their lives too. And we pray that you would help all of us to make the sacrifices that are necessary to make Jesus known so that others can be saved and know you.

[24 : 33] In Jesus name we pray. Amen.