

Write Me A Happy Ending...

Everybody wants to be happy. Everyone wants to experience a "happy ending" to their life. They want to reach their goals, achieve their dreams, gain success, be content. Our problem is that we try to achieve our aspirations as if we, ourselves, were the author of our story. We all try to "play God" and write (or rewrite) the script of our life drama.

In season four of a popular television series, "Once Upon A Time," the "happy ending" theme is prominent. In the show a book of fairytales controls everything that comes to pass. Every person's destiny is proscribed by the unknown author. The good folks get happy endings, but the villains encounter misfortune.

The action takes place in Storybrook, a town that exists in a parallel universe within the United States. All the townspeople are fairytale characters within western literature, such as Robin Hood, Captain Hook, Tinkerbell, Snow White, and Peter Pan (who is really a bad guy). One of the main characters is Regina, "formerly" an evil queen, who created Storybrook by casting a curse upon the inhabitants. However, in seasons three and four she tries to rewrite her script within the drama, changing from a very bad person to a good one. In this way she hopes to reverse her fortunes so that she can enjoy a happy ending as well (in particular, with Robin Hood, whom she loves). The problem is that the author of the book is unknown and only he can truly change her fortunes and give her what she wants.

Watch this brief dialogue between Regina and her son, Henry, regarding her future.

I will make a few observations about specific comments in the video, then I will conclude with a few remarks about cultural apologetics.

"Is there nothing in the book that gives even a clue?" - The Bible says that there are abundant clues about the divine Author in the "books" of nature (general revelation) and the scriptures (special revelation). According to Paul, nothing that we need to know about God is hidden. Our predicament is that we refuse to acknowledge we already know. We suppress and exchange the truth (Rom 1:18-32).

"These stories about me in the book..." - Regina's observation shows that most people know intuitively: there is a master narrative and an Author of the Story. Most of us also recognize that each of us has an individual role to play in God's drama.

"I was written as a villain." - This is a very interesting statement. On the one hand, it expresses the notion of destiny or divine sovereignty. Ultimately, we really know that we are not in charge. We are not truly autonomous or free. We act within our destiny and our true nature as sinners. On the other hand, Regina asserts that she is not at fault for being a villain. The author is to blame. This sentiment is endemic to the sinful human race which claims God is at fault for evil and misfortune.

"Things never work out for the villains." - This affirmation presupposes an intuition of moral law and ethical accountability. Regina knows that, even though the author prescribed her role in the story, in the end she is culpable for her unjust and unkind actions.

"I want to find who wrote this book." - Notice, she said "who." A story presumes a Storyteller. Design presumes a Designer. Ideas (plot, narrative, character) assume an Intellect.

"I want to find who wrote this book and make them, ask them, to write me a happy ending." - This is an extremely arrogant statement. It is the language of self-assertion, self-definition, and self-redemption. Yet, in a twisted and sinful way, though, it reveals an awareness of our finitude and desperate need for the God of eternity. We know we are fallen and need the God of redemption (Psalm 90).

"Is that crazy?" - No. Because we are created in the image of God. We instinctively seek Him and we thrive in His presence, as if we have a spiritual GPS system in our soul leading home to God. This also illustrates the truth of Ecclesiastes 3:11 - God put "eternity into man's heart." We are inherently and incurably spiritual. We are "hard-wired" for a relationship with the Author. We are content only as we perform our part in the divine drama. We desire to enjoy eternity in paradise with God -- our happy ending.

"This is the best idea you've ever had!...We have to change the book...because it is wrong about you!" - Translation: "Your self-redemption is a brilliant idea! We really *can* change that book! We must find the author and convince him to make things right. He is *obviously* wrong about you. You *deserve* a happy ending!"

This brief analysis is an example of cultural apologetics. Certainly, we can enjoy the artifacts of popular culture, but we should not simply consume them dispassionately or without discernment. We should also evaluate and critique, because ideas have consequences. We often become what we think. And, how we think either glorifies God or dishonors Him.

Because we are made in the image of God, cultural products express the deepest aspirations of the human heart. Because we are sinners, cultural products express values and habits committed to rebellion and deceit. Cultural expression, therefore, is a mixture. There are beautiful and wise insights (thanks to common grace). But, there are also twisted and disgraceful representations of truth. Just as Paul said, we suppress the truth and exchange it for lies (Rom 1:18-23).

But also, just like Paul, when we are prepared theologically, we can reframe cultural themes within the biblical worldview. We can use popular culture to demonstrate Gospel truth in a persuasive way. We ought to learn to do as Paul in Athens, when he quoted a Greek poet to explain divine revelation:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (17:26-29)

Or, when he pointed to an idol and declared boldly:

For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (v. 23)