



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

ElderTalk

Space Invaders 2023

MATT GODSIL

Do any of you remember the video game, Space Invaders? Back when I was a security guard in a dormitory at Bowling Green State University, there was a huge Space Invaders machine that played its tech music sounds throughout each of my midnight to 6 am security shifts. The game goes something like this: “*Space Invaders is a fixed shooter in which the player moves a laser cannon horizontally across the bottom of the screen and fires at aliens overhead. The aliens begin as five rows of eleven that move left and right as a group, shifting downward each time they reach a screen edge.*”

“*The goal is to eliminate all of the aliens by shooting them. While the player has three lives, the game ends immediately if the invaders reach the bottom of the screen. The aliens attempt to destroy the player’s cannon by firing projectiles. The laser cannon is partially protected by stationary defense bunkers which are gradually destroyed from the top by the aliens, and if the player fires when beneath one, the bottom gets destroyed. As aliens are defeated, their movement and the game’s music both speed up. Defeating all the aliens brings another wave which starts lower, a loop which continues endlessly.*”

After celebrating Christmas in the blizzard of ‘22, I am asking myself about the world we find ourselves in. Are we in the midst of a grand scale game of Space Invaders as we enter 2023? I invite you to do a brief rundown with me of biblical truth about our origins to where we are today.

In the beginning was Yahweh, the Godhead made up of three beings in one: Father, Son and Spirit. God began to create everything we know as the universe, including heaven and earth. He also created beings to inhabit the heavens. The Bible calls these beings that inhabit the heaven, “the Elohim.” They are the divine council, the cherubim, seraphim, archangels, and angels. Some of the angels rebelled against God and their God-ordained place and role in the universe.

The rebellion was squashed, and the rebel angels, led by one angel, called Lucifer, were kicked out of

heaven and sent to this world. Earth, which God had made, was formless and void. The rebel angels, which we call demons, inhabited this formless, chaotic earth. However, God brought light, life, and order to it, the formless, empty world of chaos, through His creative word and breath. The realm of His heaven overlapped this empty world. God created light, separated it from dark, and named it “day” and “night.” He created the heavens, the seas, the dry ground. He filled each of these spaces with living creatures, plants, birds, fish, and animals. His last act in this process was to create a man and a woman in the image of Himself, and God gave them power and dominion over this ordered world, the same world to which demons were cast down from heaven. These demons were restrained and contained, but present.

God then planted a garden on this earth, which He designed with order, form, and function. He provided trees which produced all the amazing food they would need. He made two specific trees in the middle of the garden. One was a Tree of Life and the other was a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God provided plenty of fresh water through the garden so that all needs would be met.

God was sufficient in His providence. He gave man a purpose. He named the man Adam, from the Hebrew word “adama,” which means “earth” or “soil.” He gave him the garden to work and care for, while enjoying all of the fruit from the tree except one. God commanded Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He even gave him this truth: if you eat from it, you will certainly die. God commanded Adam, but He did not program him like a computer or robot. God created this deadly tree. God gave Adam a command and a choice to obey or disobey. He gave this choice with a consequence.

God continued to provide for Adam. He gave him authority over the garden and all of its inhabitants. God gave him another complementary being, Eve,

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to be in an intimate relationship with, and to help make more human beings. And they were innocent and without shame.

Now there was a serpent in the garden that was inhabited by Lucifer, the head of the fallen angels. He approached the woman and engaged her in a discussion on the untrustworthy character of God and His restrictions. The woman and the man disobeyed God's one command, and their eyes were open to sin and its degenerative effects. They felt shame, covered themselves insufficiently with leaves, and hid. God called them out of hiding and further explained the consequences of their disobedience. The serpent was cursed; humanity and the serpent would be enemies; women would have severe pain in childbirth; the man's and woman's relationship would be a constant power play; the ground would be cursed; the plagues of sin, sickness, violence and hunger would abound. There would be inevitable death for all.

By man's choice and disobedience, he gave the authority given to

him in the world by God over to the fallen angels, who had earlier made the same moral judgment and choice in heaven that Adam and Eve had made—a rejection of the order and relationships God had made.

Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden where heaven and earth had beautifully overlapped, where God and man walked together. They entered into a cursed world, to which another kingdom had been established with a new authority in charge. The kingdom of this world is a system dedicated to the deception that a person can build and control his own kingdom, independent of God. Satan (the adversary) heads up this system. We read in 2 Cor. 4:4: *"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* Eph. 2:2: *"in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, and the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."* John 12:21: *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the*

ruler of this world be cast out."

But God had a plan to rescue men and women from slavery in this cruel kingdom. This plan is spoken of every time the Lord's Prayer is recited. The sentence, *"Our Father Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* shows that the kingdom of heaven is invading the earth where another kingdom reigns. This is happening after we handed over the authority God had given us to the rebel angels. He is reclaiming the territory and the captured subjects in a rescue led by the Son of God, Jesus.

The kingdom of this world had one major goal: to destroy those beings that God had made. To further discredit Him, the fallen angels were unable to defeat or hurt God in direct warfare. Their target then fell upon His creation, specifically the crown jewels of this creation, man and woman.

So we find ourselves captives in the cursed kingdom of this world. We desperately need to be rescued, or we will surely die for an eternity. Jesus emptied Himself of His divine power and invaded this foreign

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*"Cristo Redentor"
("Christ the Redeemer")
statue in Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil. Designed by French
sculptor Paul Landowski and
built by Brazilian engineer
Heitor da Silva Costa with face
by Romania sculptor Gheorghe
Leonida. Constructed between
1922 and 1931, it is the
largest Art Deco statue in the
world.*

Defiant Joy

MIKE COSPER

(A story from BONO)

“We got this invitation once.”

Bono tells me the next sentence with a tone of reverence: “*The Reverend Billy Graham would love to meet the band and offer a blessing.*”

We’re on a video call and the frontman for U2 is sitting on the floor in front of a green couch, his computer on the coffee table in front of him. It’s golden hour in Dublin, and the just-setting sun makes the room glow. It’s almost theatrical. There’s a twinkle in his eye, too. He knows he’s got a good story.

“*He’s the founder of Christianity Today,*” he reminds me, grinning. “*I didn’t know that then, but I still wanted the blessing. And I was still trying to convince the band into coming with me. But for numerous reasons, they couldn’t. It was difficult with the schedule, but I just found a way.*”

This was in March 2002, just a few weeks after U2 played their legendary Super Bowl halftime show—and days after their single, “Walk On,” won the Grammy for the Record of the Year.

“*His son Franklin picked me up at the airport,*” Bono says. “*and Franklin was doing very effective work with Samaritan’s Purse. But he wasn’t sure about his cargo.*” He laughs. “*On the way to meet his father, he kept asking me questions.*” Bono re-enacts the conversation for me:

“*You, you really love the Lord?*”

“*Yep.*”

“*Okay, you do. Are you saved?*”

“*Yep, and saving.*”

He doesn’t laugh. No laugh.

“*Have you given your life? Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?*”

“*Oh, I know Jesus Christ, and I try not to use Him just as my personal Savior. But you know. Yes.*”

“*Why aren’t your songs. um. Christian songs?*”

“*They are! Oh well, some of them are.*”

“*What do you mean? Why don’t we know they are Christian songs?*”

I said, “*They’re all coming from a place, Franklin. Look around you. Look at the creation. Look at the trees... the birds... the hills.... They don’t have a sign up that says, ‘Praise the Lord’ or ‘I belong to Jesus.’ They just give glory to Jesus.*”

For four decades Bono has found himself in conversations like this, responding to Christians who aren’t quite sure what to make of him!

(From Christianity Today, Dec. 2022. Used by permission)



A LITURGY FOR THE Ritual of Morning Coffee

Meet me, O Christ, in the stillness of morning.
Move me, O Spirit, to quiet my heart.
Mend me, O Father, from yesterday’s harm.

From the discord of yesterday,
resurrect my peace.

From the discouragements of yesterday,
resurrect my hope.

From the weariness of yesterday,
resurrect my strength.

From the doubts of yesterday,
resurrect my faith.

From the wounds of yesterday,
resurrect my love.

Let me enter this new day, aware of my need,
and awake to Your grace, O Lord.

by Douglas Kaine McKelvey in
Every Moment Holy, vol. 1, ©2001, Crossway

Ed’s note: This is from a book of liturgies for many everyday situations. It’s bound to become a favorite!



Bono

Space Invaders *(Concluded from p. 2)*

kingdom at just the perfect time, to engage in the redemptive ransom rescue of the captive subjects of this world. He has been doing so for over two thousand years and continues to do so into 2023.

Here are three important points to consider:

- 1) Jesus' rescue is targeted for all humanity.
- 2) After we are rescued, we are called to serve in the rescue.
- 3) God gave each of us a choice before the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He also gives us a choice before the cross of Christ.

As we enter this new year, I believe it helps us as believers to be aware that we are engaged in an invasion of the Kingdom of Heaven into the kingdom of this world. And we will be hated for it. No surprises there, that both the authorities and subjects of this world are going to oppose us violently. If we don't experience that reality, it is because we are not being impactful for the invading Kingdom of Heaven. We should check ourselves here; for Jesus plainly told us: *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of this world. That is why the world hates you."* (John 15:18-19)

Take heart and know that God has stormed the beaches of this world in search of you and your rescue. This rescue is led by a King who willingly sacrificed His perfectly pure life for you. He is the greatest warrior of all, our Lord Jesus. We must call upon His Holy Spirit to rally each of us for the mission ahead. Don't be discouraged when the world comes hard against you. In fact, take heart, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand in your very presence. This is the spiritual warfare of the ages, and we are called on to the victory of the Kingdom of our Lord.

And it is NOT a video game!

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

(A complete list of church functionaries
will return next month)

JANUARY 2023

- 1 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching; Ps. 130, Nehemiah 13:15-22.
- 4 Connect Groups for all ages, 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 5 Madison Middle School Tabletop Game Club, 2:30-4:30 pm.
- 8 Eric Byrom preaching; Ps. 131, Nehemiah 13: 23-29. 
- 11 Connect Groups, 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 12 Madison Middle School Tabletop Game Club, 2:30-4:30 pm.
- 13 Madison South Elementary Tabletop Game Club, 3:30-5:00 pm.
- 15 Eric Byrom preaching; Ps. 132, Nehemiah 13:30-31. KDS (Kids Disciples Training School) planning meeting 12:45 lobby.
- 18 Connect Groups, 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 19 Madison Middle School Tabletop Game Club, 2:30-4:30 pm.
- 20 Madison South Elementary Tabletop Game Club, 3:30-5:00 pm.
- 22 Elder Matt Godsil preaching; Ps,133, Nehemiah 12:27-43. 
- 25 Connect Groups, 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 26 Madison Middle School Tabletop Game Club, 2:30-4:30.
- 27 Madison South Elementary Tabletop Game Club, 3:30-5:00 pm.
- 30 5th Sunday Celebration Worship.

"Wachet auf!" - "Wake up!"
The rooster symbol atop a
German church - *photo by*
Jochen Lauxmann

