

At the Movies 2018
When Evil Comes to Call
Black Panther
August 5, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

**Worship Songs – We Are / Scripture /
Resurrecting / T&G**

Announcements – Victoria

Video Clip - 01 TELL ME A STORY (1.7 min)

(Begin) Child: “Baba” ... “Yes my son”

(End) Child: “Do we still hide, Baba?” “Yes”
“Why?”

Good morning everyone!

As Victoria said, today we are continuing in week number four of our *At the Movies* series and today’s

movie is ... *Black Panther*.

I'm curious ... how many of you have seen it?

Quite a few, which isn't a surprise. Lots of movies get labeled as "blockbusters" but this one truly *is*, ranking number one in domestic ticket sales over the past year (surpassing even the recent *Avengers: Infinity War*)ⁱ, and also holding the number three position in all-time ticket sales (behind only *The Force Awakens* and *Avatar*).ⁱⁱ

Of course, as impressive as those stats are, what's most significant about *Black Panther* is that it's the first superhero movie to feature an almost entirely black cast.

That ...

- Plus the fact that the director and writers were black.
- And the fact that most of the action is set in

the fictional (and black) African nation of Wakanda,

- And the obvious celebration of African culture that the movie portrays ...

... produced a lot of discussion and even outrage over what the film was trying to say politically and racially.

- Some saw it as a symbolic statement of black pride.
- Others took it as a slap at American black culture.
- Still others saw it as an illustration of the tension that exists between black Americans and black Africansⁱⁱⁱ (something I wasn't even aware of).
- Some were angry that the revolutionary-

minded character wasn't successful in his quest.

- Some were angry that the lone predominant white character does something good and heroic.^{iv}
- One Facebook group even tried (without success) to flood the Rotten Tomatoes website with bogus negative ratings of the film.^v

As I thought about these different reactions, I was struck by how hard it seems to be for people (regardless of their race) to see *Black Panther* as ... “just a story.”

That's not to minimize the setting and characterization of the movie – which clearly wasn't an accident. There's a lot of “black” in it – on purpose!

However, as Jamil Smith, writing in *Time*

Magazine, put it: “No one talks about Woody Allen and Wes Anderson movies as ‘white movies.’”^{vi}

In other words, no one assumes they’re trying to communicate solely (if at all) what it “means to be white.”

Therefore, we should not assume *Black Panther* is only trying to say something about “what it means to be black” ... because it isn’t.

In fact, I think it actually has *more* to say about what it means to be *human*; specifically what it means to be human in a world where evil is present and we all have to deal with it ...

... which, you know, if you’ve been here for any of the past three Sundays, is actually the theme of this year’s movie series: *When Evil Comes to Call*.

To this point, we’ve seen three different kinds of evil illustrated.

There's *random evil* – the bad stuff that “just happens” to us, often because we're in the wrong place at the wrong time. (We saw that in our first movie, *A Quiet Place*).

And then there's *self-inflicted evil*: the bad things we bring on ourselves because of our own foolish or sinful actions (which was portrayed so well in our second movie, *Dr. Strange*).

When last week (in *Murder on the Orient Express*) we looked at *malevolent evil* which comes at the hands of those who, are deliberately cruel and malicious; who, with malice and forethought, knowingly inflict pain and suffering on others.

And next week, we're going to close things out with ...

***Interpersonal (or relational) evil* which comes from people close to us who unintentionally (and sometimes intentionally) hurt us (which we'll see in the movie *Passengers*).**

But the kind of evil we're looking at today, one which is represented so well in *Black Panther* is ...

Systemic evil which are the bad things that happen to us because of unjust human systems and institutions.

This kind of evil is different from all the others in that it doesn't specifically single us out as an *individual* (like malevolent or self-inflicted or relational evil).

Instead, when systemic evil is at work ...

- We suffer because “the system” disfavors anyone who isn't part of the “in” group in a specific environment (which could be an entire culture or a local community or a cohort at work or school or even a family).
- Or we suffer because “the system” allows an abusive institution or group or leader to maintain its power.
- Or we suffer because “the system” treats people as “just a number” instead of human

beings.

Probably the most obvious example of systemic evil is racial prejudice where “the system” disfavors people because of the color of their skin.

Other cases aren't as obvious but they're just as real. When systemic evil is at work ...

- People are shunned or excluded because of their political or moral convictions.
- Salaries and opportunities for advancement are limited because of gender.
- People are shamed and ostracized because they're too fat or thin, too old or too young or too

One other unique feature of systemic evil (in comparison to the other types) is that *it's quite regular and predictable*. The “system” almost always works the same way, so it's no surprise

when “they” (or “we”) are marginalized or dehumanized by it.

So, in short, whenever you experience a repeated pattern of mistreatment because “the system” is stacked against you, you are a victim of systemic evil.

Of course, the question is “what’s the best way to deal with it when it’s happening to you?”

... which brings us to this movie, *Black Panther*. So let’s get into it.

Characters & Plot

And let’s begin by introducing several of the main characters.

First is t’Challa, who becomes King of Wakanda following the assassination of his father, King t’Chaka.

t’Challa believes that his primary duty (like every other king before him) is to protect Wakanda and

its vibrainium from being corrupted by the rest of the world.

However, t'Challa happens to be deeply in love with a young woman by the name of Nakia ...

... who has spent a good deal of time *in* that world (as a spy) and has a very different vision for the role Wakanda could play.

Listen to what she says after he asks her to stay in Wakanda following his coronation.

Video Clip - 02 HOPEFUL VISIONARY (1.0 min)

(Begin) Nakia: "I came to support you ..."

(End) Fades to scene of countryside

While that discussion is a hint to the awakening that will eventually take place in t'Challa, something else is about to happen that will have a dramatic impact on Wakandan serenity.

Erik Stevens (A.K.A "Killmonger") is about to commit a crime that will soon bring him to

Wakanda.

As this scene begins, he appears to be an art aficionado who is simply filled with questions about pieces from the African continent. But he's really not.

Let's watch.

Video Clip - 03 ANGRY YOUNG MAN (1.4 min)

(Begin) Killmonger: "What about this one?"

(End) Klaue shoots.

Now, there's a lot going on in that scene.

It's all a setup between Killmonger, the young woman working at the bakery counter and, obviously, the guy doing the shooting ...

a thoroughly despicable man by the name of Ulysses Klaue ("claw") ...

... who is the only non-Wakandan to have ever been in Wakanda, very briefly, 30 years before.

The reason that matters is that, while he was there, he stole vibranium (killing one of Wakanda's leading families while doing it) ... which means that

- For 30 years he has been number one on Wakanda's "most wanted" list.
- For 30 years, the network of Wakandan spies has been searching for him without success.

But they're about to get a big break in the case because what Killmonger really wanted from his association with Klaue ("claw") wasn't vibranium.

It was ... well, let's watch.

Video Clip – 03a WHO ARE YOU?

(KILLMONGER) (0.7 min)

(Begin) Killmonger walking thru a field

(End) W'kabi: "Who are you?"

Great question and one which will become the central focus of the story from this point on.

But what's revealed in this scene is that Killmonger had worked with Klaue ("claw") only so he could get close enough to kill him and impress the Wakandans by doing something that their leaders had been unable to do for 30 years.

And why would he want to do such a thing?

Because he has something not-so-nice to say to King t'Challa and his royal council.

Let's watch.

Video Clip - 04 I WANT THE THRONE (3.0 min)

(Begin) Killmonger stands before the Council

(End) t'Challa: "I accept your challenge."

The reason Killmonger wants the throne ... the reason Killmonger has a royal ring just like t'Challa's ... and the reason t'Challa accepts his

challenge ... is that Killmonger is not only of Wakandan descent he is also *t'Challa's cousin* who grew up in the slums of Oakland, CA.

And that happened because *t'Challa's uncle* – King *t'Chaka's brother* – was living there as a spy in the early 1990s. And while there, he had a son – *n'Jadaka* (A.K.A. Erik Stevens, A.K.A. Killmonger).

But something radical happened to *t'Challa's uncle* in Oakland.

After observing so much systemic evil (in the form of racial injustice), he became disillusioned with the Wakandan policy of isolationism. So he gave Klaue (“claw”) access to the country so that Wakanda would be exposed to the world and forced to act.

When *t'Chaka* found out, he went to Oakland to confront his brother and wound up killing him.

Even worse, he left *n'Jadaka/Erik*

Stevens/Killmonger to fend for himself ... alone, as a young boy ... which explains why Killmonger is so angry and bitter. Not only did he see the evil his father saw, he experienced it firsthand. He's been a victim of it.

And the reason t'Challa accepts his challenge – which is a fight in which you either yield or die to determine who will be king – is that *he himself* has just discovered the truth about his father and his uncle and, of course, his cousin. He knows that Killmonger has a rightful claim and so they fight.

And Killmonger wins. He throws t'Challa off of a cliff which leaves everyone thinking that he is dead.

But of course, he's not. *He's the Black Panther* and he *can't die* in his own movie!

Instead, he's just on ice for a while (literally) ... which means there's a new king in town with a very different agenda.

Let's watch.

Video Clip - 04a A NEW KING IN TOWN (1.4 min)

(Begin) Killmonger: "You know, where I'm from ..."

(End) Killmonger: "Let's get to it."

Two Approaches

Now at this point, I want to push pause for a just a bit and talk about what we've seen to this point in terms of dealing with systemic evil.

On the one hand, there's the traditional Wakandan approach which could be called "protection and purity."

This approach says "the world out there is a very bad place and the best thing we can do is to keep it out there. Let's not get too upset with what they're all doing to one another unless it somehow impinges on us. If that happens, then we'll defend ourselves.

“But really, what’s most important is that Wakanda maintain its purity. Keep the outsiders on the outside and we’ll stop the evil from coming inside.”

Of course, the fact that t’Challa’s father, King t’Chaka murdered his own brother and left his nephew alone in the world proves the fallacy of that logic.

The other approach we’ve seen is Killmonger’s, which could be called “revenge and revolution.”

This approach says “we have the power to do something that avenges all the wrongs suffered; something that starts the world over and puts us on top instead of *them*.”

Of course, while Killmonger’s anger and rage is completely justified, even if successful, his strategy will only serve to replicate the same system he hopes to avenge. His dream for Wakanda is no different from any other

oppressive regime: “An Empire,” he says, “on which the sun never sets.”^{vii}

Now what’s fascinating is that these two approaches have been around for thousands of years. For thousands of years, individuals and clans and nations have embraced them and followed them.

In fact, some of us in this room or watching online are following one or the other right now.

- Right now, today, we’re a victim of systemic evil like Killmonger was, and we want revenge and revolution in some form or fashion.
- Or, we’re like t’Challa – we see it happening to someone else, but we think it’s best to keep our distance and protect our own little world.

Oh, and by the way, both of these approaches

were also around when Jesus of Nazareth came onto the scene!

We talked about this quite a bit last winter and spring, how Jesus was born into a world in which the political, economic and religious institutions were hugely oppressive to the average Hebrew man or woman living in the land of Palestine.

The Roman Empire (and the Persian Empire before that) had ruled over the Jewish people with an iron fist, commanding their resources, limiting their religious freedoms and taxing them severely for hundreds of years. And the question front and center in everyone's mind was "Where is God? What does He want us to do about this?"

One group, the Essenes, believed the best strategy was to protect the inner circle by maintaining purity so they literally went off into the desert and created a highly exclusive culture and community. Only those who met their standards of purity were allowed in.

Sadly, their movement never gained much traction and died off when the original leaders died off.

Another group, the Zealots, believed the best strategy was to overthrow the Romans. And they tried repeatedly to do so until A.D. 70 when, sadly, the Roman Empire leveled Jerusalem, putting an end to their movement as well as any trace of Israel as a political state ... something that Jesus actually warned was going to happen 40 years before it did.

In response to both groups, Jesus said there is a better way, a completely different strategy:

To those who want to protect and purify, he said:

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put

it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” *Matthew 5:14-16*
(NIV)

The thing that the Essenes (and many other Jewish groups, including the Pharisees) forgot was that Israel had been chosen by God to play a unique role. In a way, Israel was kind of like Wakanda.

Among all the peoples of the earth, God had given them the great gift of revelation. He had revealed Himself to them and given them the 10 Commandments which would have the incredible power to change the world for good. They were blessed specifically so they could be a blessing by inviting other nations to know their God.

But instead of helping the world, Israel saw it as

an enemy to be avoided or, in the case of the Zealots, to be overthrown.

To them – to the Zealots – Jesus said ...

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV)

And what I love about this movie is that t’Challa actually comes to see *both* of these truths. That ...

- Wakanda isn’t meant to be hidden. It’s been blessed to be a blessing.
- And the role they need to play is one of

service to the world, not domination.

... which is very similar to what Nakia was pressing for at the very beginning.

... which also means we need to pick up where we left off in the story.

The Rest of the Story

Killmonger is in charge and ready to put Wakanda's vibranium to work for his vengeful and revolutionary purposes.

And while t'Challa didn't die, he is very close to it. He's discovered lying in the snow by a neighboring tribe and now his family has come with that special herb that will hopefully revive him and give him the strength of the Black Panther again.

As they perform the ritual over him, t'Challa finds himself on the Ancestral Plane where he

confronts his deceased father and all of the Wakandan kings before him.

Let's watch.

Video Clip - 05 YOU ARE WRONG (1.4 min)

(Begin) t'Challa stands in the Ancestral Plane

(End) t'Challa awakes and sits up

And so that's what he does.

t'Challa wakes up (as we saw) and just as Killmonger is about to launch his attack on the world, t'Challa – in the form of the Black Panther – drops in on him, literally.

Here we go.

Video Clip - 06 THE PANTHER RETURNS (2.0 min)

(Begin) W'Kabi watching container come to the surface

(End) Border tribe charges

And, of course, at this point there's a big battle ... because, after all, what's a Marvel superhero movie without a big battle scene near the end?

And, as you would expect, t'Challa prevails.

As for Killmonger, he is wounded but instead of accepting t'Challa's gracious offer of healing, he defiantly refuses. Remaining bitter to the end, he actually brings about his own death.

I'll say more about that in a minute but, in the final scene (at least before the scenes buried in the credits ... because, after all, what's a Marvel superhero movie without a scene or two AFTER the movie is over?)

... in the final scene, t'Challa and his sister, Shuri, make a special trip to set a few wrongs right and also to set a new course for the nation of Wakanda.

Let's watch.

Video Clip - 07 WHO ARE YOU? (T'CHALLA) (1.7 min)

(Begin) Shuri: “When you said you would take me to California ...”

(End) Kid: “Who are you?” (fades to black)

And I love that this is the way the movie ends – with the question of “who are you?”

In fact, I think that’s the point of the whole thing .. because that is the question before all of us who live in a world in which evil often goes beyond the random and personal to something much larger and insidious and even demonic: cultural, economic, family systems which seem to propagate injustice, inequity and pain all by themselves.

You can take steps to protect yourself from the other kinds of evil, but you can’t do anything about your skin color or your accent or your deeply held convictions or the fact that you’re just a number in the system.

The Choice

So, who are you in the face of that evil? And who do you want to be?

When t'Challa tells Nakia that his father's decision to leave Killmonger in Oakland has helped to create the monster that he is, Nakia responds, "You can't let his mistakes define you. You get to decide what kind of king you're going to be."

That's true for us, too. We get to decide who we want to be. We don't have to follow the pattern of those who have come before us.

So, what kind of decisions shape us into people who can overcome systemic evil?

We've already heard and seen two illustrated.

1. Embrace the calling to be a blessing to the world.

2. Use whatever power you have to serve, not to dominate.

That's what Jesus said and, as we saw, that's what t'Challa did.

Of course, some would argue, well, that was easy for *him*. He was in a *position* of power with tremendous resources!

But what about someone in Killmonger's position? Someone who was clearly hurt and abused by the system and justifiably angry?

And that really is the question, right? Because that's where so many of us find ourselves. How could he (or we) overcome the systemic evil that oppresses us?

Turns out that the answer is exactly the same.

- Try to be a blessing

- Seek to serve instead of dominate.

Here's why I say that – and we talked about this a lot during our *This Is Jesus* mega-series.

Jesus, the Anointed One, the Messiah, showed *no interest at all* in either making use of or dismantling the religious, political and economic structures of His day. I think that's because He knew that any system humans create will always contain elements of evil that wound and destroy.

For example, history shows if you ...

- Replace capitalism with socialism ...
- Replace socialism with communism ...
- Replace communism with anarchy ...
- Replace anarchy with capitalism ...

... in every case what you'll do is trade one form of systemic evil for another. That's just the reality of curse of sin under which we all live.

And that's how it's going to be until Jesus returns and judges the evil; sets everything to rights ... which is why, to men and women living under some of the most oppressive systems ever, He said things like:

*“You have heard that it was said,
‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’*

“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”

Matthew 5:38-41

And then the overarching principle:

... which I know we've talked many times in recent months but we need to be reminded of it again and again:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be like your Father in heaven who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Matthew 5:45 (NIV)

In other words, Jesus is saying, “God blesses everyone regardless of how they treat him. God uses his power to serve everyone instead of dominating them. And if you believe in Me, that’s what you should do, too.”

Of course, if you’re *not* a believer, I guess the reason for at least trying Jesus’ strategy is that the opposite approach – Killmonger’s strategy – will leave you bitter and maybe even dead.

Conclusion

Now, I know this all sounds so simplistic and naïve in light of our sophisticated world with all of its problems but the reality is that Jesus Himself –

God who willingly accepted the limits of human flesh – followed those exact same principles.

So when He invites us to be a blessing and serve instead of dominate – even from a position of weakness – He is the evidence that it works.

- Otherwise, you and I wouldn't be here this morning.
- Otherwise, He and his movement would have entered into the trash bin of history, never to be heard of again.

But that's not what happened.

He gave his life to bless the world and to be its servant and, in return, the Father has exalted Him and given Him the name that is above all names. And one day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus really is King over all.

So ... question:

- What would happen if instead of repaying evil with evil as Killmonger did, we began to repay it with good?
- What would happen if instead of lamenting the evil of “the system” on Twitter or Facebook, we actually *did* something to make life better for just one other person?
- What if instead of cursing the current occupants of political office we volunteered to help in an organization that was actually doing something?

What would happen to our world if *at least those* who believe in Jesus made those kinds of thing their pattern of behavior?

- Knowing that we don’t ultimately belong to this world and its kingdoms which will one day pass away;

- Knowing that we belong to a higher Kingdom that will last forever – God’s Kingdom!
- Knowing that our purpose here is to live out the values of that Kingdom; to shine its light so that others can find it, too.

Feature – Heaven on Earth (Stars Go Dim)

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. *Swing Into Action* Charity Golf Tourney - THIS Friday, August 10th @ Tiffany Greens Golf Club (Noon Registration and Lunch; 1 pm Shotgun Start)

This year's money raised will benefit Hillcrest Platte County and Restoration House of Greater KC. Both organizations do amazing work and bring hope to the hopeless. Stop by the table in the commons as you leave.

2. Offering at door or online

3. Blessing

help us not to be overwhelmed by evil doers. Help us never to become jealous of those who do wrong. Help us to trust you. Help us to do good in the face of systemic evil. Help us to stand up to injustice

—

to search for truth

—

to not just go along to get along.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/past365.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/domestic.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Both groups use derogatory names to refer to each other.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/02/16/black-panther-why-the-relationship-between-africans-and-african-americans-is-so-messed-up/?utm_term=.258a82c1a2ff

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- ^{iv} <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/how-black-panther-liberalizes-black-resistance-for-white-comfort>
- ^v <http://time.com/black-panther/>
- ^{vi} <http://time.com/black-panther/>
- ^{vii} https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2018/02/22/black-panther-feels-radical-but-superheroes-can-never-lead-a-real-revolution/?utm_term=.570c0128af8a