

Kingdom Report

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The Queen's Gambit

On the day my sister died I had decided to binge watch the entire Netflix series "The Queen's Gambit". There are times of solace when art imitates life. Here some thoughts on "the hero's journey", life, chess, good cinema and a life worth living.

That Saturday morning my niece and her siblings were at my sister's bedside for her last hours and sent us a short video clip of my sister's last hours in a coma. I had done my weeping and praying, now all I wanted to do was not think, just "clutch out". I had heard from Facebook friends about the Queen's Gambit series and as a past enthusiast of chess in my school days I decided to just spend the day on a Netflix binge.

As the story unfolded I was just blessed with a parable of life, my sister's life and a word of encouragement that the Lord wanted to share with me in my grief.

The Queen's Gambit had become the most popular scripted limited series in Netflix history. In the four weeks since landing on the streaming service, the drama has been watched by 62-million subscribers, ranked at No 1 in 63 countries, and come within the top 10 in 92. For all the pomp and ceremony that attended its arrival last month, the real hit of the new schedule has been a gentle adaptation of a 1983 novel by Walter Tevis about an orphaned chess prodigy, Beth Harmon, and her quest to become the world champion.

I liked the whole ambience of the setting, plot and cinematography, a real work of retro art. It was set in an America that I grew up in when our family arrived there in 1960 from South Africa. We young 5 siblings were the outsiders, we could not speak English, a new world that we had discover and had to find our way in. This was the story of young Beth Harmon, a lost orphan growing up in an orphanage in 1950's America. The outsider, alone, who at young age learned to play chess from the orphanage janitor. And discovered she had an amazing gift, a talent for chess.

There have been cinema experiences for me that had a "parable of life" type quality to them. Things that resonate with each of us in that they carry a message. For me it has been series like Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, The Matrix Trilogy, the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises or old westerns.

But The Queen's Gambit was an interesting experience for me. The game itself and the young girl playing the game held a truth about life....and it resonated with the last conversation I had with my sister days before she died when we both knew it was our last time in this world together.

The game of chess itself has a seemingly simple structure. It is limited in space, 64 squares. It is limited in resources. You are given 16 pieces of various abilities. The rules are limited and simple to understand. The time for the game is limited. But to finish the game with a win, the complexities after the first moves are so immense and easy to lose your way.

In the series you see the growth of Beth Harmon from child prodigy to world champion. Her mastery of chess had to run parallel to mastery of life. The right moves on the chess board had to be complemented with the right moves in life. She started with intuition and passion and natural talent, but that was not sufficient to get her to the top. She had to learn discipline, study, books, opening studies, strategies of the past masters, end game studies. She needed a team around her to support her and train her.

This theme though the history of storytelling has been the story of the "hero's journey". It resonates with all of us. The individual on a quest, the scarce resources, the enormous obstacles of life. The successful end. I liked the way this well known story plot was told here, no special effects, no violence, no sex, no miracles...just one young girl's story of a life learning to make the right moves on a chess board and the right moves in life.

This of course just got my spirit stirred in all sorts of directions: the end of my sister's life on earth; the state of our young people and culture today as opposed to years gone by; the problem of prophets, divine guidance and the right moves in life. Well I wasn't completely comatose from 6 hours of binge watching.

So here some random thoughts from The Queen's Gambit.....

I have been sharing with you my concerns in previous posts about the church and our relationship to prophets and the prophetic. Here is where my thoughts went. Sitting in the chess tournament of life we contemplate the complexity of our board position. It all started out so simple.....pawn to king four...Bobby Fischer's favourite opening and mine. But now? Please Lord what is the next move? So we buy books on "Hearing the Voice of God" or attend prophetic conferences desperately hoping there is a prophetic word for us or a vision or a dream. Hey and maybe there is!

But maybe there isn't. Maybe the Lord wants you to make the move. Making the right move in life is why the Lord gave us another comforter, the Holy Spirit. What we need is not the answer to what is the next move but how can I play the game of life better. For that we need the discipline of study...study the Word of God, get a team around us, let the Holy Spirit teach us about the value of our resources, the pieces on the board, the tactics of the enemy all of which is why scripture says "if any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God..."

Wisdom is the ability to make the right decision at the right time. Growing in wisdom is the purpose of the "hero's journey" in life. Jesus was the example for us. Here are two scriptures in Luke 3: 40, 52 about the young Jesus growing up in our world....

"And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit filled with wisdom and the grace of God was him" vrs 40

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man" vrs 52

Which thoughts led me to my sister and her child/parent mentoring business and the critical problem we face with our young generation.

It is not by accident that the author of the story of Beth Harmon chose to make the start of her journey in life from an orphanage or some deprived and desperate background. Matthew Parris in his book "Fracture" recalls how through history we have a record of those who come from early trauma, poverty, bereavement, illness, abuse are often the ones who have the strength of spirit and discipline to endure the trials of life to do great things in the world.

Working against this trend is the modern youth of today with enabling parents who want to be sheltered from all conflict, trouble and effort. In the great universities of America a "woke" culture requires "safe spaces" for tender souls not to be exposed to adverse thoughts or arguments. Voters yearn for politicians who will promise them free everything. Free education, free housing, food, medical care. A carefree life in every sense of the word. No cares. No struggle. No hard decisions. Young people and adults who are willing to vicariously enjoy the fake emotion of other peoples success as portrayed on TV and cinema but never have a "hero's journey" of their own.

My sister Andalene identified the early onset of these spoiled adults and adolescents as starting in spoiled brats at home. She herself had her own "hero's journey". At 19 she had her first child and 3 more followed soon after. No time for university or career development. She had to learn the hard life of how to make things happen, how to bring income home for raising 4 children, how to do with what you had. How to raise 4 children on limited means and turn them out into the incredible successful adults all four are today (and the 12 grandchildren they also brought into the world).

She did not take the modern day feminist out of "the right to choose" as in I have the right to choose to kill my baby because it is very inconvenient for me to be raising a child at 19. Or the 3 more who came afterward.

Andalene took all she learned from these life experiences and started an international consulting businesses. She consulted to parents with troubled young kids. She held seminars all over the world and parents paid her for an hour home consultation. In that hour she met the children, counselled parents, set guidelines, established discipline and brought order and structure. She is loved and honoured by hundreds of clients who became friends for what she did for their children and for their homes.

Watching the Queen's Gambit and the story of prodigy Beth Harmon and her journey of life brought to me the strange coincidence of my sister finishing her life journey that day. It was a life well lived with all the right winning moves on the chessboard of life. She had a prodigy's ability to analyze the position of the chess pieces of life in a broken family and help them to make the next right move and teach them as parents the right moves in life to raise successful children. She has countless testimonials all over the world to that fact.

The Wednesday before she died I had a last private talk with her. She had described to me things she was seeing and experiencing. I recognized it immediately from my studies in scripture and NDE's (Near Death Experiences). I told her, Andalene your journey here on earth is coming to a close. Your soul body is starting to disconnect from your physical body and transferring to your wonderful and magnificent spirit body. The angels and the Lord would now be taking over the rest of the journey, just be at peace and enjoy the journey. I knew it would be only a few more days.

I then described to her the next wonderful phases of the journey. She was going to be surprised by how wonderful and solid and strong and energetic her new spirit body is going to be. She is going to see thousands of new colours she has never seen, smell fragrances she never imagined, taste and see things never dreamed of. She is going to be delighted to finally meet her angel cohort who has been with her since she was born. They are going to be so excited to carry her home. Her entrance to heaven is going to be a major shock. Jesus said if you confess me before men I will confess you before my Father and the angels of heaven. You have confessed the Lord your whole life to people.....when you enter heaven the angels will introduce you to Jesus and He will introduce you to the whole family of heaven and there will be an allmighty shout of "Hi Andalene welcome home!" of billions of voices greeting you. But the next thing that happens after homecoming is something very private and very personal. Jesus will take you to your own secret place also known mistakenly as a "mansion" in heaven. Actually it is your private paradise...there you will meet your heavenly Father. Jesus said in Revelation that He will give you a new name that only you and the Lord will know and He will tell you His name. The greatest pleasure of heaven will be your times of private meetings with the Lord when He sits down with you and the two of you have a meal together and time of intimacy when He calls you by the name He called you from the foundations of the earth and named you and created you for exactly who you have become. You are finishing here on earth at age 65 because you have lived the life the Lord always wanted you to live and you have become the child He always dreamed you would become. So now it is time to go home.

She told me, I am tired I want to go home.

There was one more thing we had to discuss. And I want all of you to remember this. I told her there is no difference in dying at 65 or 85, you will still at 85 say "But I still want to do this or I want to do that." Every person has a list of "I wish I had not done this in the past or if only I knew when I was younger what I know now". All of us finish life here with "If only's" and a list of "But I still want to do...".

The "if only's" of the past are covered under the blood of Jesus and will never be mentioned in heaven. However the list of "But I still want to do...", well that is why you were created because if you think you have lists of things you still want to do, wait until you meet the Father and the incredible list of things he wants to do for eternity with you.

We all have limited time and limited resources and limited space in this earthly realm. The greatest thing we can learn here is "wisdom". Wisdom starts with the fear of God and it ends one day with the reality that you have fallen in love with the Lord God with all your heart and soul and strength and you want to be with Him whom you love....and like all great stories your journey of the hero at the end is a love story.