



There is a story of a chess grandmaster visiting Paris for a competition. Whilst there, and for something to do, he visited the Louvre and walked amongst the paintings. He finally came to one called 'checkmate', which depicts a young man in despair playing the devil – presumably for his soul.

The young man is in despair as he is seemingly out of moves, the devil having won.

The grandmaster was mesmerized by the painting and stood at it for a long time, before finally smiling to himself.

He asked the curator if they had a chessboard, and once found he set the pieces up exactly as the painting depicted. He stood behind the white pieces and continued to stare at the board, before once again he broke out into a smile.

Looking up at the boy in the painting he said – “Boy I know you can't hear me, and I know it looks like all is lost, however I want to tell you that you haven't lost yet! Your king has a final move that if made will win you the game!”

Throughout the entire Old Testament God and the Devil have been locked in a long chess match:

God Created angels, Satan countered by rebelling

God countered by creating man in his image, Satan countered by getting Adam and Eve to turn control over to him.

God attempts to redeem Adam and Eve, but Satan gets Cain to kill Abel

God creates Seth so that people call on the name of the lord, but Satan builds a religion in defiance of God in Babel

God creates the covenant with Abraham, creating a people of his own. Satan gets them trapped in Egypt.

The whole old testament is move, countermove, move countermove, until at last in the New Testament God decides he's had enough of working through people so figures it is time to come down to us and sort it himself through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The chess game continues...

God comes down (in the form of Jesus); the Devil tempts him to earthly delights in the desert.

Jesus heals people in the streets; the devil sets people out to kill him

Then we get to Jerusalem and Jesus is killed on the Cross. The Devil it seems has won. We are back to the boy in the painting, seemingly checkmated by Satan. But God has the final move by the king to make – the resurrection! And in this final move Satan is beaten for good.

We let Satan control our lives far too much, not always on purpose, but he is there whispering in our ear. You need the drink, you need the drugs, you need the money, you need x, you need y, you need z... Satan drives us to despair and the beauty of why he is as good at it as he is, is that we don't even attribute it to him! At some point in our lives we will be the boy in the painting, sat before the devil having lost to him, or so we think. There remains the final move by the king to play.

The resurrection of the Lord gives us that victory over the Devil that we need. We must place our trust in him and trust that we will be saved from Satan. We need to follow the way that Jesus showed us, and pick up our crosses daily, just like he did.

There are numerous examples of this in the bible, but I don't think anything demonstrates just how life-changing putting trust in God can be, than the story in Luke 8:26-39/Mark 5:1-17 with the man in the Gerasenes. Here we have a man who no one could control. He was unclean in every sense of the word and possessed by a *legion* of demons. A legion was a roman division of at least 3000 soldiers, often as many as 6000. These demons had totally taken control of this man's life. He self-harmed, he lashed out at others, and he was living in a graveyard.

Satan had certainly outplayed the man on the chessboard.

But, *'when he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."*' (Mark 5:6-7) Mark writes that the man saw Jesus and ran to him – continuing the metaphor he played the final king move. The Demons inside the man were powerless when the king made its final move, they were driven out of the man into the swineherd and drown. God won the game, the man was cured of the demons, and his despair turned to joy.

That however is not the end of the story. The man wants to go with Jesus, but he instead sends him away with a mission – he gives the man his own cross to bear – and again Mark tells us that *'he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.'* (Mark 5:20). The cured man didn't just go home, he went *'in the Decapolis'* proclaiming. This means that he went through 10 cities proclaiming how God had *'won the game'*.

Returning to the painting... It may seem that your game is over, that you have lost, but just remember in that situation there is always hope. Your king has the final move. Put your faith in God and your demons will be beaten. It may take longer than you think, but faith in God will help you overcome the demons affecting your life. But like the man cured of Legion, don't stay quiet when it happens!