



Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2

--facing death and self-sacrifice

Churches and Christians have been divided by Harry Potter. Some see the books and the films as evil and full of sorcery and witchcraft; others see them as fantasy about wizards, imbued with Christian themes. I found them to be compelling reading and viewing, tapping into quintessential themes of good and evil, love and redemption, and sacrifice. As C.S. Lewis' seven books of "The Chronicles of Narnia" captivated the youth of the 50s, J.K. Rowling's seven books in the Harry Potter series rekindled reading for today's generation.

Ten years and 8 films later, the Harry Potter movie phenomenon comes to an end with the second half of The Deathly Hallows (book 7). And what a way to end the series: with this thrilling, action packed tense adventure. It is a truly satisfying conclusion.

Even before the opening credits, the film is up and running, beginning exactly where part 1 left off: revisiting the scene where Lord Voldemort

(Ralph Fiennes) gets the most powerful Elder Wand from Dumbledore's tomb. From there, it moves to the beach in the aftermath of Dobby's death where Harry (Daniel Radcliffe), Ron (Rupert Grint),

Hermione (Emma Watson) and several friends are mourning and burying the freed house elf. When the students at Hogwarts are shown being marched through the courtyard guarded by hovering dementors, it is clear the battle lines have been drawn.

This is a classic good vs. evil culmination where familiar faces will face death, some succumbing to it.

Part 1 of The Deathly Hallows had the famous trio

searching for Voldemort's horcruxes. The Dark Lord had used these to store portions of his soul in his attempt to find immortality. Three are left to be found in this film. Unlike the earlier movie, this one

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starts frantically and carries the pace throughout as the film spans a mere couple of days. It is non-stop action.

The film communicates this breathless nature even while adding some levity. An early scene has Hermione transfiguring into Bellatrix Lestrange (Helena Bonham Carter) via polyjuice potion to access her vault at Gringotts.

There we experience a literal roller coaster ride as the friends descend only to find their way barred by a dragon. Here is an actual dungeon and dragon!

As the trio escape, the movie moves to Hogwarts for the final two acts. The last stand of good against evil occurs where the wizardry all began. Here the final battle takes place, with Voldemort's minions, numbering thousands, taking on the vastly outnumbered and less mature students and teachers. There is more than a nod to the climactic battles in *The Return of the King*, the film that brought *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy to a close.

Despite the pace, director David Yates, who himself has matured in his handling of the last four films in this series, finds time to bring some emotional revelations and some true heart. In particular, the death of Severus Snape (Alan Rickman), the perennial nasty prof and Judas-figure, delivers an unexpected disclosure (unless you've read the book).

But when all is said and

done, this film is about the final confrontation between Harry Potter, the boy who lived, and Lord Voldemort, he who shall not be named. And the final duel does not disappoint. Rather, it underscores the true nature of these characters. It also reiterates the themes that have been present throughout the whole series: self-sacrifice, death, good vs evil.

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During this confrontation Voldemort egotistically shouts, “Only I can live . . . forever!” His desire is apparent: power and immortality. Drunk on these, he seeks to subvert anyone and anything that stands in his way. In contrast, Harry stands as the humble Christ-figure who seeks nothing for himself.

Real-life has its own Dark Lord: Satan. He is alive and active on planet earth (1 Pet. 5:8), seeking to usurp God’s throne and domination (Isa. 14:13). He wants to live forever. But the end of the story has been written, and he does not attain eternal life. He is destined for the death in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). In contrast, all who follow Jesus will live forever in heaven with their Savior (Rev. 21).

Virtually all the characters come face to face with death here. Indeed, author J.K. Rowling has said that the series is fundamentally about how we respond to death. There are two main camps. The first are those that fear death and do anything to avoid it. Many death-eaters fall into this category. They don’t want to face the wrath of the Dark Lord and so submit to him. In our world, many people fear death and so avoid it by ignoring it; seemingly taking an ostrich approach, they put their heads in the sand and refuse to acknowledge death as if this will keep this specter at bay. Then there are those who realize that there are values and goals that trump death. Harry and his friends will fight evil until the end, even if it means dying in the process. There are some in real life who adopt this philosophy. Usually they understand that death in this life is not the end; there is a life to come, whose eternal nature makes this life seem like a mere breath (Isa. 40:23-24), a short introduction to an epic adventure in the next life.

And then there is Harry. Having seen his friends face death and some die, he declares, “I never wanted any of you to die for me.” He is willing to face death himself, but does not want to put his comrades in danger. Motivated by a desire to save, he puts himself in the position of embracing the fullness of Voldemort’s power. What a display of love!

Indeed, this illustrates Jesus’ point to his disciples: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn. 15:13).

At its heart this film and its predecessors emphasize the victory of love and self-sacrifice. Earlier installments played on the love of Harry’s mother that saved him and endowed him with his power and connection to Voldemort. But here it is Harry’s love and actual self-sacrifice that ultimately wins the day.

Here is Harry as a Christ-figure. Jesus Christ humbled himself from a position of glory and greatness to become human (Phil. 2:6-7). And in his earthly life and especially death, he gave himself for others (Gal. 1:4). Sinless (Heb. 4:15), the Savior carried our sin to the cross that crucified him (1 Pet. 2:24). And when Satan thought he had won the battle, with Jesus buried in a dark tomb, God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24). Jesus experienced victory over death itself and eventually over Satan. Today, Jesus sits at the right hand of God (Mk. 16:19), orchestrating the events of history, steering it towards his eventual confrontation with Satan which will bring history to a close (Rev. 20).

Since the backstory is assumed, if you’ve never read one of the Harry Potter books or seen any of the other films, you should definitely skip this one. But if you’re a Potter fan, this is the best film yet!

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Martin works as a manager in the high tech industry. He leads a monthly film review group at Mosaic Church in Portland, Oregon. He writes film responses from a biblical perspective on his blog: www.mosaicmovieconnectgroup.blogspot.com
Contact: martinbaggs@gmail.com