

“Jesus is the Snake on a Pole”

John 3:14-21

On Monday morning, as I was in my office looking over the texts for this week, I was really stiff and sore. I couldn't figure out why. So I start reading our Old Testament lesson where God sent the “fiery snakes” to punish the Israelites and He had Moses make the bronze serpent and put it on a pole and if the people were bitten by a snake, they could look at the snake on the pole and they would live. That snake on the pole is the symbol for the medical community and for healing.

As I said, I was stiff and sore, and there was no snake on a pole to help me. I couldn't figure out why I was so sore, and then I remembered that Julianna and I had gone for a walk in Bob Mays Park last Sunday. It was a walk that turned into a sprint at the very end. She beat me – legitimately. That had never happened before. I couldn't catch her and I stopped running before I pulled a hamstring. Apparently, both of us got older since last summer.

As I was sitting in my stiff and soreness, hoping the ibuprofen was going to kick in soon, I read an article about an executive from Google named Bill Maris. He actually is the head of Google Ventures which invests in up-and-coming new companies and technologies. Mr. Maris has been budgeted \$425 million this year and he has the freedom to invest it however he wants.

Bill Maris is 40 years old and is fascinated with the prospect of improving health and extending life through science and technology. The title of the article is “Google Ventures and the Search for Immortality.” The belief is that technology and artificial intelligence will surpass human capabilities in the next generation. In order for us to keep up and not be overtaken by the machines (the plot of many science fiction movies), we will have to enhance our bodies (even our DNA) through robotics. And this will allow us to not only keep up with the machines we have created, but will allow us to live for 500 years – or possibly even forever.

I know that this sounds like the plot of a bad science fiction movie, but this is what you get with the religion of secular humanism. Bill Maris says, “It will liberate us from our own limitations.” Our limitations cause death. What would be these “limitations”? St. Paul says, “The wages of sin is death.”

Basically, the Google corporation is prepared to invest \$425 million this year to overcome the basic problem in man caused by sin. I wonder if he would send any money to Our Redeemer if I shared with him the key to eternal life and the sure and absolute way to overcome the basic problem of sin leading to death? I would gladly absolve him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for \$425 million. In fact, I would gladly do it for free. The problem of death has already been solved. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Death has been conquered and it didn’t cost you anything, let alone \$425 million. The cost was paid in full by the Son of God on the cross.

Death does remain a problem for all humans. This body will cease to function some day – unless the Lord returns first. The real issue is being born “dead in our trespasses” – being dead in

our sin, as St. Paul says. Our sinful self, as he wrote, lives “in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” I doubt Paul ever imagined that this would include the attempt to overcome sin and death by making yourself part robot. Bill Maris is quoted as saying, “I hope I live long enough not to die.”

It is man’s desire not to die. It is also man’s desire to figure out a way to cheat death. I read about Google’s aspirations and it sounds like the Spanish explorers seeking the “fountain of youth.”

The science fiction stories of today are simply modern mythology. The brilliance of modern science fiction is how the writers tend to weave the story into actual historical events. And then they can take the leap into imagining what is possible. This is nothing new. This is good story-telling. One aspect of science fiction that is troubling, is that the future worlds imagined are almost always absent of God.

Within science fiction, if there is a reference to a current religion, it tends to be negative, or the concept of religion will be referred to as the “dark age of superstition” which is thankfully gone. Many of this current generation have grown up with this modern mythology where science reveals truth and God does not exist.

Don’t get me wrong – I love stories of superheroes. I love Star Wars. It is modern day mythology. And I have always been fascinated by mythology. Even as a kid, I was interested in Greek mythology. Did you know that the idea of a “fountain of youth” shows up in 5th Century BC writings of Herodotus? It shows up again in the 3rd Century BC in some mythology surrounding stories of Alexander the Great.

The issue is separating the myth from actual event. Sinful man looks to myth to solve the problem of sin leading to death.

God actually solved the problem by sending His Son into the world. And Jesus is no myth. As I have mentioned several times recently, as a real historical event, you cannot deny that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person. You cannot deny that there was an empty tomb – which means you have to wrestle with the claims that are made about that man – who is claimed to be the Son of God.

God sending His Son into the world is so much more than some vain hope in a “fountain of youth” or robot body parts. As I said, that sort of vain hope has always been around – not just with ancient Greeks or Spanish explorers. There are stories of the “fountain of youth” from the time of the Crusades. I grew up watching numerous cartoons referencing the “fountain of youth” – Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, the list goes on and on. There is the “Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park” in St. Augustine, FL – the spot where Ponce DeLeon landed. And you wonder why all the retirees go to south Florida – is it just for the weather?

The point is, these desires to find a way to “live forever” without relying on God have been around for a long time. It goes all the way back to Adam.

Whether it is the “fountain of youth” (which I could have used last Monday) or “robotic body parts” (I suppose I could have used those also. Maybe I would have won the race), regardless of whatever means a person tries to find, our sinful nature always seeks a way to figure out how to conquer sin and death apart from the Son of God being hung on a cross to pay for that sin. But Jesus being hung on a cross has always been the plan. God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son to be like that snake on a pole.

We must look to Him. There is no other way to have eternal life. Amen.