

"Third Rock from the Sun": A Christian Perspective

Welcome to Earth, third rock from the Sun

She walks into Smokey's, one hip at a time/Like a broken field runner slippin' through the lines
He likes the way she looks, so he calls the little wife/Says "Don't wait up for me, I'll be working late tonight"

Wife hangs up the phone bursts into tears/Calls her sister up and cries, "Get over here"
Sister tells her boyfriend, "Be back in a while"/Boyfriend wants a beer, the store is just a mile
He leaves the motor runnin', he'll only be a minute/His car drives away with teenagers in it
The driver tells his buddies, "Got one life to live"/They scream into the night, let's get it over with

(Refrain)

'Cause and effect, chain of events/All of the chaos makes perfect sense
When you're spinnin' round/Things come undone
Welcome to Earth, third rock from the Sun

The kid guns the gas, car starts to swerve/Heads for a semi-truck, jumps the curb
Truck hits a Big Boy in the Shoney's parking lot/Flies through the air, takes out the bank clock
Clock strikes a light pole, transformer sparks/Lines go down, town goes dark
Waitress calls the cops, says she saw it all/Swears a giant alien has landed at the mall
Cops ring up the mayor says, "There's panic in the street/We hate to wake you up, but we can't find the chief"
Mayor says, "Use your head, if he ain't in his car/He's hiding from his wife, down at Smokey's bar"

(Refrain)

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-written by Glenn Martin, John Greenebaum, and Stirling Whipple

This song was the title track to Joe Diffie's fourth studio album. This album was his big break, as the first five tracks were all released as singles, and all five placed on the country charts. "Third Rock from the Sun," as well as "Pick Up Man," reached the number one position, and "So Help Me Girl" reached number two. The album itself was certified platinum by both the Recording Industry Association of America and Music Canada.

"Third Rock from the Sun" can be classified as "neo-classical country," and Joe Diffie's style has been compared to George Jones. "Third Rock from the Sun" is a classic example of the tongue in cheek humor that country music is famous for. Unlike other analyses I have done for songs, I will not be breaking the lyrics down and examining them in detail. Instead, I am going to look at the song as a whole.

We see as early as the second couplet that this is a cheating song (something else that country in

general, and Jones in particular, is famous for). But what is different about this cheating song is that it is not from the perspective of those in the love triangle, but rather the perspective of an entire community. As the lyrics skip from one person to another every few lines, we see lust, despair, boredom, grand theft, recklessness, massive property damage, and finally anarchy. And the final punch line of this dark comedy is that the one who caused all this social upheaval is the town's chief of police, the man most responsible for maintaining this community's peace.

There is no such thing as a little white lie, a victimless crime, "what happens here stays here," or whatever delusional moniker one wants to come up with to pretend one's wrongful action won't affect somebody else. Indeed, one's wrongful actions affect everybody and everything. While it is often obvious how one's actions may affect those directly targeted, and while it's also not too hard to show the impact a few levels beyond the immediate victims, it is difficult to see just how far and widespread one small, wrongful act can go. Every now and then, something like this song comes along and shows us. The famous, century old proverb "for want of a nail" is another classic example. But while the proverb focused on attention to details and the consequences of omission, "Third Rock from the Sun" delves into willful evil, an evil the perpetrator apparently thinks no one knows about (why else would he lie about what he was doing?) But we see that at least his wife and the mayor know exactly what he's doing. And even if it had been a better kept secret, the women he sleeps with will know, and things like pregnancies and diseases can have massive impacts on many people. Any time one thinks there is a victimless crime, one is being blind to an infinitely long chain of events that has been set in motion.

Like I said before, this chain of events extends to things as well as people. I understand this is a difficult thing to grasp, but it is true. Can someone cheating on a test cause a tsunami that wipes out a village? I don't know, but I do know that our faith says it is possible. Science routinely shows how we are more closely connected to the planet than was previously thought possible. We see in this song how the chain of events that was started by an attempted adultery (in the video, the woman slaps the chief and storms out of the bar) led to a power outage and town wide anarchy. Who is to say a chain of events started by cheating on a test couldn't lead to a tsunami?

The Bible itself tells us in many ways just how connected we are to each other and to the world. Genesis in particular is very rich in this regard, but we are reminded of it quite often as the story of God's presence and His plan to save us unfolds. Genesis 1:28 says "have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the Earth." Next, we move to Genesis 2:15 -- "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." There is no doubt that God intended man to run the world. As man runs the world, the world will reflect man's nature. And since man's nature is corrupted (Genesis 3:6), it follows that the world is corrupted. God Himself points this out in the so-called "curse" -- "cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you ... By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat." (Genesis 3:17-19) God did not strip man of his responsibilities, God man man live with the consequences of his actions. The world is hostile to man because man made the world hostile. As children of man, we all still shape the world in our corrupted image.

This lesson is repeated in the story of the flood (Genesis 6:5-8:22). In particular, we have Genesis 6:6 -- "[God] regretted that he had made man on Earth." God's grief is squarely on humanity, and it is only humanity that is culpable. Yet the whole world will suffer for it. "So the Lord said, 'I will wipe out from the Earth the men whom I have created, and not only the men, but also the beasts and the creeping things and the birds of the air.'" (Genesis 6:7). Of course, one can debate several theories as to *why* God destroyed creatures other than man from man's corruption. Was it because man's mismanagement corrupted the animals? Was it because the interdependence of each other means that if one suffers, all

suffer? Perhaps something else? I don't know, but what I do know is that the Bible tells us that man's fate is tied to the rest of nature, and *vice versa*.

We also have clear Biblical evidence that all of mankind is united. We have not one, but two patriarchs from which all humans come: Adam and Noah. Regardless of how one feels the literalness or metaphoricalness of these teachings are, it is undeniable that the teaching here is that we are all related. Furthermore, we find that all mankind is one body in Christ mentioned several times in the New Testament, with 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 perhaps the most famous reference.

Of course, just because we are all related does not necessarily mean we have the connection I am talking about here, that the actions of one will affect everyone, everywhere in some manner. If these passages I mentioned were all there was on the matter, it would be *non sequitur* to say that because we are all related, we all must suffer or benefit from everyone else. But there is more, much more, to be found to support my point.

The patriarch of a family set the tone, for better or worse, for his whole family. Scripture simply overflows with examples of this concept. We can begin with Adam and Eve, as their actions resulted in the whole of humanity being corrupted. Consider Romans 5:12-14 -- "Just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all ... death reigned ... over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam."

Next, I would like to bring up Dathan and Abiram, from Numbers 16:12-15, 25-34. When they rebelled against Moses, we see that these men *and their families* "went down alive to the nether world with all belongings to them; the Earth closed over them, and they perished from the community." (verse 33) Note that "families" would not only include the men's wives and children, but also any extended family members who looked to them for familial leadership (much like a chieftain of a clan) and servants. Also, "possessions" would have included livestock as well, as Hebrews were famous for their flocks. The threat of these men could not be tolerated, as the fate of the Hebrew nation would have been threatened with corruption. Everyone who owed familial loyalty to these two men had to be removed, lest they spread the contagion of the patriarch.

The next two examples I would like to bring come from the book of Joshua. In Joshua 6:23 -- "the spies entered and brought out Rahab, with her father, mother, brothers, and all her kin. Her entire family they led forth and placed them outside the camp of Israel." While there is no reason to suspect that Rahab's retinue was anything near what Dathan or Abiram had, we nonetheless see how the actions of one impacts the many, in this case in a good way.

But right after this touching story, we again come to grief, as we learn about Achan, who "took goods that were under the ban [of spoils from Jericho]." (Joshua 7:1) Despite scouts claiming Ai was an easy target, the courage of the Hebrews failed in their attack after only 36 casualties (Joshua 7:2-5). While this is a small loss, Joshua himself feared the people of the land would find courage and annihilate the Hebrew nation (Joshua 7:7-9). But God told Joshua to identify the guilty party by lots, and when the guilty party was found, he was to "be destroyed by fire, *with all that is his*, because he violated the covenant of the Lord and has committed a shameful crime." (Joshua 7:15, italics mine) The narrative not only explicitly states that Achan was stoned to death (Joshua 7:25-26), but we are told that "all Israel took Achan .. with [his stolen spoils], and with his sons and daughters, his ox, his ass and his sheep, his tent, and all his possessions, and led them off to the Valley of Anchor," which is where he was stoned (Joshua 7:24) In many ways, this is a repeat of the story of Adam: while Adam doomed the whole world and all in it to pain, suffering and death, Achan's action threatened to destroy God's chosen people. In order to

save His people, God had Achan and all he had control over removed.

Without going into all the detail, I also want to mention that those who sought the prophet Daniels' death, "Along with their children and their wives ... [were] cast into the Lion's den." (Daniel 6:25) It is clear that the families of the common patriarchs were assumed to be extensions of the patriarch, and therefore needed to suffer for the crimes of their patriarch. These family members could have spread the corrupted ideas of the patriarchs. It is for this reason that the books of Proverbs and Sirach encourage a man to seek a good wife, and why parents were to turn criminal children over to the the elders (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). They recognized the interconnectedness of individuals, families, the state and even the world around them.

With such a strong tradition coming from the Old Testament, we won't see this lesson pressed as strongly in the New Testament. Nonetheless, we see many scriptures where this foundation is essential to the new revelations. "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26) We also have "From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three: a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, ..." (Luke 12:53) Of course, this "hate" is not the opposite of "love," but rather the need to place God above family. By challenging the familial bond, Jesus was deliberately trying to reinforce the importance of God. This was a clear warning that one cannot be pure and remain connected with the impure; one either rejects the impure or remains corrupted. For a more positive example of this, we have Ephesians 6:1-9.

Although "Third Rock from the Sun" makes light of a horrible sin, it nonetheless does a wonderful job reminding us how we are all connected. The song proves the lie of relativism (morality is subjective) and the absurdity of a "victimless crime." The lesson of the song is firmly grounded in the Old Testament, and used as a foundation for the higher learning of the New Testament.

A king ... decided to settle accounts with his servants. ... A debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt.
--Matthew 18:23-25

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