



## Batman and Forgiveness

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Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* is the fifth Batman film to be released and the first since the disastrous *Batman and Robin* in 1997. *Batman Begins* did very well critically and commercially. It was the fifth most successful film of summer 2005 in America and the second most successful *Batman* film after the 1989 original. It has received largely excellent reviews. Ross Anthony for the *Hollywood Report Card* writes, 'Strong writing, acting, directing. A surprisingly very strong film. You'll get your money's worth.' It is not a sequel to the other four but a darker revision of the series. It focuses on Bruce Wayne's journey to becoming Batman and how the man behind the mask is transformed through his harrowing life experiences.

Bruce Wayne's (Christian Bale) life changes when he's only a child when a mugger, Joe Chill, kills his parents outside an opera house. Bruce feels responsible, as it was his fear of bats that drove them out of the opera early. He's raised by the family butler Alfred (Michael Caine) and almost kills Chill after the mugger's parole hearing, but a mob operative gets there first. Bruce's childhood best friend Rachel Dawes (Katie Holmes) now works as an Assistant District Attorney and is horrified by what Bruce planned to do. Furiously, she explains to him the difference between justice and revenge, and tells him his father would be ashamed. After a run-in with Gotham mob boss Falcone (Tom Wilkinson), Bruce jumps on a ship to China where he is eventually arrested for stealing goods.

In jail, he's persuaded by a mysterious stranger Henri Ducard (Liam Neeson) to join the League of Shadows, a group of ninja vigilantes headed by Ra's al Ghul (Ken Watanabe) based in the Himalayas. They plan on purging evil and achieving justice across the world by dealing with one corrupt major city at a time. Through learning about the powers of deception and theatrics, and improving his fighting skills, Bruce becomes highly adept. He is eventually asked to join the League of Shadows. But for his final initiation, he must kill a thief, which he is unable to do. He then learns that the League plan to destroy the corrupt Gotham so that it can rebuild itself. Angry and defiant, Bruce burns down the League headquarters, killing Ghul and leaving an injured Ducard with nearby villagers to recover. He decides it's time to go back home.

Appalled at how corrupt Gotham has become, Bruce begins creating an alter-ego for himself. Taking the symbol of the bat from his childhood fears, Bruce recruits lowly Wayne Industries scientist Lucius Fox as his armourer, and the only good cop in the city, Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman). He also constructs a lair in a cave under Wayne Manor where a colony of bats lives. Not only does he have to deal with Falcone, but also with Dr Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy) who is apparently treating patients in a mental ward but gradually reveals his own unhinged nature through his work for his unseen higher boss. He eventually becomes the Scarecrow. As Crane and his boss plan to destroy the city by fear, Bruce has to convince Rachel that he's not the obnoxious playboy he appears to be, and save the city his father tried to improve.

The key theme in *Batman Begins* is fear and the power it can have over us. The film demonstrates this clearly in the first scenes where a young Bruce Wayne falls down a well and is traumatized by the colony of bats living there. This key sequence is touched upon throughout the film: when Dr Crane infects Wayne with his fear toxin, which causes him to relive the experience, and in how Wayne adopts the bat as a symbol to make criminals fear him. Fear is seen throughout the film in the way the citizens of Gotham are repressed by the criminals who take over, using fear of consequences to rule. *Batman Begins* vividly shows how fears can overcome and

control us through the character of Dr Crane using his fear-inducing toxin to subdue his patients and later his enemies. This is an extreme vision of how fear can manipulate people and prevent them from doing what they want. However, it is a good demonstration of how we can allow ourselves to become overwhelmed by our fears, which can sometimes be used by other people for their own ends.

Whilst fear is very present throughout the film, Bruce's alter ego Batman demonstrates how fear can be overcome. As director Christopher Nolan points out, 'Bruce Wayne becomes his own worst fear.' By confronting his fear literally (converting a cave full of bats into Batman's hideout) and turning his fear into a symbol for criminals and the corrupt to fear, Bruce puts an end to his own fears. He also becomes a symbol for helping other people get over their fear. Rachel Dawes is already less afraid, determined to uncover what is going on at Dr Crane's asylum despite no one else helping and her disappointment in the returning Bruce's apparently blasé attitude. Through knowing Batman and fighting against the fear that grips the city, good cop Jim Gordon becomes less fearful of standing up and making a difference, and Lucius Fox is no longer forgotten but eventually becomes head of Wayne Industries. Through knowing and helping Batman, they become stronger and overcome their fears.

Clear parallels can be drawn between the figure of Batman and Jesus. Like Batman he was a radical figure who changed people by the example he set. As Bruce Wayne himself says: 'People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy.' That is what both Batman and Jesus are. Through standing up against fear when no one else would, they inspired others to also stand up. But Jesus is much more than an example. There is a strong difference between Jesus and Batman in that Batman always fights evil with force and violence whereas Jesus has already won the decisive victory over evil by sacrificing himself. Jesus did not use force; he used grace and love to win. Because of this victory, there is hope of a new heaven and a new Earth where there will be no more corruption or violence.

Whilst all of us experience fear at some point in our lives, the Bible gives us a strong reason not to.

In 1 John 4:18 it states, 'Perfect love drives out fear.' Knowing and experiencing God's love expressed in Jesus' death and resurrection means that we have no reason to fear anything. Whilst *Batman Begins* has the important central message of one man fighting against fear, that man uses violence and anger whilst the Bible teaches us that it is God's love that has put an end to all our fears and that, thanks to this love, we have a place without pain or violence to look forward to.