

Title: 02 – The Matrix

(Thanks to David Dark <http://www.explorefaith.org/dark/matrix.html> for many of the ideas in this sermon)

Warner Brothers' 1999 sci-fi action movie *The Matrix* hooked a lot of people. Perhaps you were one of them. What fascinated and intrigued so many was the movie's thought provoking plot, stunning set design and costumes and captivating dialogue.



And while we cannot endorse the movie's violence and objectionable language, its immense popularity and its fundamental premise do raise some interesting questions.

The Matrix centers on the concept that the known world is an illusion. It follows the story of a character called Neo. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the year is not somewhere in the late 1990s, as everyone

believes, but the late 2190s. The world as we know it has been destroyed in a war between human beings and machines with artificial intelligence. Humans built the machines in the early 21st century. And now, in a nuclear-winter-like setting in which these machines are deprived of sunlight as an energy source, they have enslaved the human race and are farming people as a source of bioelectrical energy.

The humans are kept in an unconscious state in pod like containers in a vast holding field, plugged in to a central computer. In this nightmarish scenario, everything in the world—cars, buildings, cities and countries—are part of a complex computer-generated virtual reality called the Matrix, within which the humans interact. Everything they see, smell and hear is part of this virtual construct and doesn't really exist. A computer program merely stimulates their brains and deceives them into believing that they are all living normal 20th-century lives—eating, sleeping, working and interacting together. They are all blinded to the truth about how and why they exist.



But a handful of people have escaped from the Matrix and know the truth.

One of these, a man called Morpheus, hacks into the Matrix and contacts Neo. And in the video clip we saw before Morpheus invited Neo to go down the rabbit hole, as Alice did in Wonderland, to discover the truth. In that scene Morpheus says four things which are profoundly true. I do not know what the religious background of the writers of *The Matrix* series, but the words they put into Morpheus's mouth are biblical truths, which are worth considering this morning.

The first thing that Morpheus says he is, "You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad."



It is a great image, isn't it? "A splinter in your mind." You know when you get a splinter in your finger how it can send you mad. You pick at it for a while, but then you forget about it, until you try to pick something up, and then a bolt of pain reminds you that you have a splinter in your finger—there is something wrong.

In *The Matrix*, people had no way of knowing that the computer-generated reality wasn't real. But Neo, and those like him, just knew, deep down in their guts, that something was not right. They could not put their finger on it. They just sensed that there was something more than that which they thought they saw and heard and felt and understood.

Similarly, we have no scientific way of detecting or refuting the spirit world. But like Neo, we experience things, "like a splinter in the mind," that do not make sense without an understanding of the existence of the biblically revealed spiritual dimension. Deep down we know there is something more. There is something going on behind the scenes. There is more than just this physical world.

Religion is a universal phenomenon; look at any culture anywhere in the history of the world and each one of them has some sort of religious belief. Despite the predictions of the 19th-century atheists, that religion would die out as the scientific age took hold, religion does not fade away, in fact it grows more powerful everyday.

Research is concluding that humans actually have a neurobiological spiritual predisposition. In other words our brains are actually hard wired for an awareness of the spiritual realm. And when we try and contain ourselves purely within the physical world, our brains yell at us "there is something wrong." There is a splinter in our minds.

The second thing that Morpheus says to Neo which reflects a biblical truth is this: "... you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind."



If anybody was to come up to us and to say that we were enslaved, our natural reaction would be to deny it. We live in Australia don't we? And surely one of the great claims we have is that we are a free people. We are free to do what we want. We have freedom of speech. We have the freedom to achieve anything we sent your mind to – or so the mantra goes.

However, you can be a slave and not know it. Every day I see people who are enslaved to things. There are the obvious ones. People who are enslaved to alcohol, or other drugs, or gambling. These things control their lives. They might sometimes look like normal people, but inside their head all they can think about is the alcohol, the next bet, or the drugs.

But there are a whole host of other things that people are enslaved to: food, sport, mobile phones just to name a few. Have a look around and you will see people enslaved to a whole host of things. Those things control their lives. Yet they would seek to deny it, until it is pointed out to them.

However, the Bible tells us that like those people trapped in the matrix, all of us are enslaved to something. What is that something? Romans 6 tells us we were enslaved to sin – whatever one submits to becomes his or her master. To commit sin, then, puts one into bondage to sin, and the sequel is death.

It is a difficult thing for us to accept. We take such pride of being in control. But it only takes a few moments of reflection to realise that there are things that we should do which we don't and things we don't want to do which we do.

We want to be more generous, but we are miserly instead.

We want to be kind to our families, but we are the grumpy old men.

We want to be gracious to other people, but we criticise and depreciate.

We want to be environmentally responsible, but we just keep on consuming.

We want to break that habit, but we just can't.

We want to control our anger, but we keep losing it.

And the reason we do those things, even when we don't want to, is because ultimately we are slaves - we do what we are told by our sinful natures. And because it is master we are slaves to sin.

And until we realise that, we will continue to be in self-delusion. Like all those people trapped in the Matrix, who think that they are free, who think that they control their lives, who think that reality is just what they see until they realise that in fact they are enslaved.

Can I encourage you to reflect honestly upon your life? Are you really in control? Or do you do things that you don't want to do. Or do you not do the things that you know you should? If so it might be time to be honest with yourself and recognise that you are in fact a slave to sin. The question is whether you want to do something about it.

That is what Morpheus asks Neo about his slavery: do you want to do something about it? Morpheus



presents Neo with two pills and asks him to make a choice. "You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. Take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes."

The blue pill was an anaesthetic which would mean that Neo would go to sleep and that the rebels would be able to simply reinsert him back into the

matrix and he would never remember what he had seen. But the red pill would cause his real body to be ejected from the matrix and he would begin the journey to freedom. That was his choice.

And this morning you are faced with a choice. You are quite entitled to hear my claims this morning, that you are enslaved to sin, and take the blue pill and wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. Millions of people make that choice every day. They hear the claims of Christianity, but choose to believe they're not true. They choose to just keep on going the way they are going. To take the blue pill to live happily in the unreality of the matrix.

However, some people like Neo, like many of the people who are gathered here this morning, have chosen at some point in their lives to take the red pill. They have decided to engage with reality. They have decided to engage with the truth, no matter how painful that is.

Taking the blue pill pushed Neo out of his comfortable cocoon like existence in the pod and caused him to see himself as he really was - a biochemical cell in service of the machines. But it also meant that he left behind the deluded comforts of the matrix and instead entered the harsh world of reality of hardship, danger, lousy food. Taking the blue pill does not end your problems, in fact it opens up a whole new host of problems. But, taking the blue pill means at last you are genuinely free.

Becoming a Christian, which involves acknowledging your enslavement to sin, is like taking the blue pill. It opens up a whole new world that you never thought could exist. A spiritual world, but a world also filled with its own new and unique challenges. In many ways it is a more difficult world than the non-Christian world. But it has a number of overwhelmingly positive advantages which means that most of us would never consider going back.

To live in a day-to-day relationship with God. To know his life and character and to have it grow each day. To share life with a community of faith. To have guidance for everyday decisions. To know forgiveness. To know redemption. To know a touch from God himself. To know freedom. Yes true freedom. I would choose the blue pill any day.

Jesus made a wonderfully concise summary of what I am suggesting this morning: ^{Jn 8:34} Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.



The red pill of Christianity is repentance from sin - acknowledging that you are a slave to sin and rejecting its mastery over your life - and acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord. Ironically freedom from sin means enslavement to Jesus Christ. But enslavement to Jesus Christ is actually the greatest freedom you can ever experience. It literally is a wonderland. Doing life with Jesus is the greatest adventure you could imagine. It makes Alice's adventures in Wonderland look boring. As Jesus says, if the Son sets

you free you will be free indeed. I invite you to try it and see.

Morpheus is just a creation of the Wachowski brothers. But Jesus Christ is real and his promises are real. You are sitting in the midst of a whole group of people who have taken the blue pill - who have gone down the rabbit hole, who have experienced life outside the matrix. The real world. And this morning I am going to give you the choice - to choose to stay in your world of self-delusion, or to enter the real world, the world of truth, the world of God.

Morpheus says to Neo: I'm trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You're the one that has to walk through it. All I am offering is the truth.



All I am offering here this morning is the truth. You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. Take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.