

Analysis of S3E08 of The Twilight Zone - It's a Good Life

Season 3, Episode 8 of The Twilight Zone, “It’s a Good Life” has got to be one of the most terrifying pieces of media I’ve ever consumed in my life. After a late-night binge-watch session of around 6 of the best episodes, this one stuck with me the most purely from a psychological standpoint. Most of the time in Twilight Zone episodes, there’s always a deeper meaning such as religion or fantasy, or a lesson that we take away but this episode does something completely different which focuses on concept alone. While the lesson is always up for interpretation with this show, this is one of the few instances where there is no lesson to form ourselves, where the plot is literally laid out in its entirety at the beginning, and it takes its concept and runs strides with it. This episode would be nothing without its execution, being pacing, writing, acting, etc.

But first, let’s talk about the plot itself. Based on the 1953 short story of the same name by Jerome Bixby, a 6-year-old omnipotent boy has the ability to control anything in life. He is a personification of both God and the Devil in one small boy. He has the power to wish away anyone and anything “into the cornfield” which, while it is up to interpretation, the corn represents a place where things go to die. Or, it could be the idea that he wishes everyone around him into a world where they no longer reside, and the cornfield is where they are left behind. Either way, it’s borderline terrifying to think that a 6-year-old boy who lacks empathy has the power to end people’s lives just by thinking about it. The town in which he resides has been cut off from the rest of the world completely, leaving its residents to wonder if they are the last living souls in the world. He took away everything, all automobiles, and electricity, yet he can control what he, and in turn, everyone else sees on television, giving them a glimpse into the 6-year-old God’s mind. The example they use in the episode is dinosaurs attacking each other, being representative of the mass chaos and destruction, yet lack of remorse the boy feels for his actions.

After the program is over, what's remaining of the neighborhood gather to celebrate a man's birthday. For his birthday, he receives a Perry Como record, but seeing as how the electricity is gone, he has no particular means of playing it without calling upon Anthony (the boy) to be able to play it. You can really see in the man's performance that he does not want to swallow his pride to ask the boy to be able to play the record. Not to mention, that the boy does not like singing, as explained by the earlier monologue from Rod Serling where he took away his Aunt's singing voice. However, my interpretation was that he had begun to think negative thoughts about the boy, seeing as how he wishes he could go back to how life was before he was born and had power, and that scared the rest of the family into getting him to stop. The man then gets drunk and begins to think very negative thoughts about the boy, which I'm surprised made it past the censors back in 1961 when this aired. Even nowadays you couldn't get away with making a comment towards a kid about killing him, but you have to understand the context of the whole episode. Of course, the boy banishes the man away into the cornfield, but not before turning him into a jack-in-the-box (believe me, it's one of the scariest things I've seen in my life, I'm not joking) and because no one can think negative thoughts about the boy, they all have to say that he made the right decision, and continue to tell him how good he is. His wife is forced to forget about him for the rest of her natural life and focus all her attention on the boy. The boy begins to make it snow, killing the remaining crops, but he can't be critiqued on this, and so the family just continues to coddle him. The episode ends.

Let me just say, this concept would be my personal hell. Not being able to completely express my feelings and succumb to a boy who lacks empathy and the global scope of his actions would make me question what's in a life to begin with. I'm serious. If I would have to live my life in constant fear of having it taken away by someone who I can't bargain or reason with, I wouldn't know what to do and the indecisiveness would eat me away. Would I stay alive only to be a slave to the boy, constantly reassuring and reaffirming that everything he does is perfect? Or would I choose to die, only to be unsure of what lies in the afterlife. Would or COULD an afterlife be worse than this?

The Wikipedia description of the plot says: "The people live in fear of him, constantly telling him how everything he does is "good," since he banishes anyone thinking unhappy thoughts into the otherworldly cornfield from which there is no return. Never having experienced any form of discipline, Anthony does not even understand that his actions are wrong." This, for lack of a better word, fucks with my mind. You cannot reason with the kid as he knows you're thinking unhappy thoughts about him, and if you were to try, as the drunk man does, he just instantly kills you. He is an omnipotent being who cannot be criticized. He doesn't understand the consequences of his actions. The way the actors perform, make it seem like this concept is perpetual, and we only get a glimpse of this hellish nightmare of a life that these people live. Their death is inevitable and in the near future, and it's controlled by the boy who does not understand the concept of how the world works.

Do you think that the boy knows the people around him are afraid of him and that they are faking their feelings just so they aren't sent to the cornfield? Would or could you train your brain to only think positive thoughts about someone who's constantly ruining everything in your life?

This episode makes me think about how children have the most vicious intentions in society, but no means or power to follow through with their actions. This episode raises the question: What if they had the power to do whatever they want to other people? With adults we can narrow it down to multiple things: sex, money, success, etc. but to a child, it's black or white, life or death. With a child in charge, you start to question the fragility of your own life. Your life is so fragile in this scenario, that a single negative THOUGHT can be the cause of your death.

Overall while there is no tried and true message of the episode (Serling himself even says "No Comment" at the end, even he is terrified of this concept), I think there's gotta be SOMETHING underlying the episode. I've narrowed it down to two messages: The harshness of parents coddling their children, and our own God. The first message I came up with was the idea that parents are responsible for creating their own monsters. If you coddle your child long enough as the parents do in this

episode, you'll create an Anthony, someone who kills with no remorse and no scale of how the world works. I also believe that Anthony represents our own God, picking off people for no particular reason other than the fact that he believes it is their time. What if our God is just an omnipotent 6-year-old boy that we have to think positive thoughts about when we praise him, and if we think one negative thought about him, we're sent "to the cornfield," in this case, hell?

This episode really caused me to have an existential crisis, didn't it? After watching and questioning and analyzing this episode, I still feel just as terrified as after I watched it with no context or background of it, and that I feel, is the mark of a good episode of a TV show... One that will stick with you for a long time.