

The Power of Fiction and Knowing God:

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.
-C.S. Lewis

It's impressive how JRR Tolkien led his atheist friend CS Lewis to faith in Christianity. They were both teachers at Oxford, Lewis was a lecturer, Tolkien was a professor and a Christian believer. One day while walking on a path by Lewis's rooms near the river, Tolkien made an evangelistic move that basically laid the foundation for that atheist becoming a Christian believer.

From *The Inklings Fellowship of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends*, essay "On Fairy Stories," one of the things that Tolkien says that is amazing is what he called secondary belief. When somebody tells you a story and you know it really happened, it is a primary belief. When someone tells you a story you know is fictional, but it is so well told and the characters are so well developed and the plot is so well developed too, even though you might sit there at the movie or listen and read the book, it draws you in - you get scared and happy. The story is well told and COMMANDS secondary belief. It makes you have the feeling as if to some degree it's true. You get scared even though it's not true - you get scared for that character and you're excited when you see the resolution.

We live in a secular realm, a secular time, a scientific time, and the leading modern literature has been telling us life is meaningless then you die and yet we still crave a certain kind of story. We crave it in movies, we crave it in books and these are stories that depict a supernatural world. It depicts cheating death, escaping death, escape aging in time - stories that show us a love that is eternal, a love without parting, a love that overcomes death. We want stories about absolute triumphing over evil - destroying evil. We love stories about victory snatched from the jaws of defeat or sacrificial heroism that brings life out of certain death and we pay money to watch those movies and we pay money to read about those stories. They're myths, they're legends, they're fairytales and people say life is not like that. Tolkien pointed out the fact that these are deep human longings and for some reason human beings want the kind of stories that are very well told, that evoke secondary belief that catch you up in them that tell you good will triumph over evil - that there is a supernatural world, that you're not stuck in time, that there is love without parting, that there is a way of escaping death. We know at the fact level we all do have to die, that evil often triumphs, that no matter how much you love somebody eventually you're going to lose that person or they're going to lose you.

We are told at the factual level there is no supernatural, we are all going to die, there's no escape, good is not going to triumph and yet underneath, for all human beings we feel that there shouldn't be those things. We're not meant to die, we're not meant to lose our loved ones, good should be triumphing over evil, there ought to be a supernatural world, we shouldn't be stuck in time and then we're dead. That at a deeper level we feel this is how reality ought to be. That's why Tolkien believed that even though fairy stories at a factual level aren't true, most people feel in some ways they are true. They point to an underlying reality that's almost truer than the way life is actually being lived in this world. That's the reason why we pay good money to see - the happy endings, the heroic sacrifices that bring good out of evil, triumph instead of defeat - that's what we still want to watch. We don't want to read high literature, it's nihilistic because that's the way life really is. We say maybe it is, but it shouldn't be and that's the reason why the popular stories tend to be like fairytales.

C.S. Lewis although an atheist really felt the power of fiction in the fairytales, he loved them, but, he said, even though they point to a "what life ought to be like" they're really not, they're not true. As he was walking along with Tolkien that day, he said myths, fairytales are lies though breathed through silver. As beautiful as they are, as much as they point to the way life ought to be, they are just lies. Tolkien said "no they're not. Here's why I say they're not. Look at the gospel, look at the story of Jesus. Do you realize what you have there? Everything that moves you about a story. Escape from death, a love that conquers death, good triumphing over evil, heroic self-sacrifice and when everything looks the darkest - LIFE OUT OF DEATH, TRIUMPH OUT OF DEFEAT, everything you would want in a story. The story of Jesus is not one more story pointing to the underlying

reality, rather, Jesus is the underlying reality to which ALL the stories point and the reason we know that is because of the resurrection. The resurrection is what happened, the resurrection was this underlying reality breaking into this world and the way life ought to be and the way life is - Jesus Christ is our great captain, he's opened up a cleft in the pitiless walls of the world, he's punched a hole through that concrete slab between life as it is and life as it ought to be, between the ideal and the real. Now the resurrection proves that it was not a defeat on the cross it was a triumph. It proves that Jesus made satisfaction for sins, it proves that God can come into your life, that Jesus can come into your life--he's ALIVE. Take a look at the evidence of the resurrection. Jesus is not the one more beautiful story that makes you feel good for a while and then the lights dim and you walk out into the real world. "

There's a place in the fairytale, the fairy stories, Tolkien says, the peculiar quality of the joy. Joy in a successful fairytale can be explained as a sudden glimpse of an underlying reality that the gospels contain, a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of those wonderful fairy stories. The gospels contain the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe (a sudden and favorable resolution of events in a story; a happy ending). The story of the gospel has entered history and the primary world. The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of man's history, the resurrection of Christ is the eucatastrophe of the story of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Him. The whole story ends in joy. No tale ever told that men would rather find is true, than Jesus' life, and none, which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merit.

A professor of philosophy at Princeton seminary told a story of how he actually found faith. He was an agnostic and went off to World War I. He was an agnostic, didn't really believe in God, he was into philosophy, he was skeptical about the whole idea of religion, but during WWI he had an experience like a lot of other military people. One of his best friends was next to him on the war field, talking about his mother, and suddenly was shot and then died. Later on, a bullet hit him and he was in the hospital for a while. He realized even though he was an agnostic and still wasn't sure if he believed in God, realized to really make sense of this world and this life he was going to need more help than just his skeptical philosophy. So, he started reading poetry and books, and every so often he would find a passage in a book that really seemed to make sense to him. He said he began to long for a book that understood him.

He bought a journal so he could record anything that made sense to him so he could make sense of his life, and make sense of the world and give him the joy he was looking for. One day he went out and sat under a tree and as he read his journal, writing from recording for a year, he was deeply disappointed. He had already changed. Some of the things that really hit him previously didn't hit him anymore. He realized he himself was a moving target. Any book he read would be like a gun pointed in one spot, and then he would move and he realized he would never find a book that understood him. That very day his wife was out walking with their child and talked to a French Huguenot, a pastor who gave her a Bible in French. They didn't have a Bible. Her husband, the professor saw it and said: "give that to me." He read the gospels all night and he actually realized that as he was looking at the one the gospel was written about, that here finally there was a book that is alive and a book that understood him. It's not just a book that understands him, but also it was and is the Word of the Lord. The story of Jesus and the Word of the Lord, That's what the world needs and that's what he needed.