



Seeing with Stories

by Dale Fincher

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After seeing *The Fellowship of the Ring*, I walked away from the movie thinking about my mother. My mother commented how the Ring really represents the burden she bears.

In the story, Gandalf the wise, is speaking to young Frodo who has been given the burden of bearing the Ring of Power that has the potential of putting all of Middle Earth under shadow. The quest is to destroy the Ring by sneaking into enemy territory, through the barren wasteland infected with grisly sentry, and throw it into the volcano from which it was forged. All the while, the Ring itself enchants all who come in contact with it, controlling their desires for evil, persuading them to become hideous creatures of power.

Frodo turns to Gandalf and says that he wishes the Ring never came to him. He never asked for the burden. But Gandalf, in his wise way, says in effect, "It is not for us to choose our burdens; but for us to

bear our burdens well."

Big words, but not easy. You see, my mother is suffering with cancer. She never asked for it. It came to her, like it does to millions around the world. Her job is to bear it the best she can. She knows a Master of Ceremonies is at work, engineering the entire Universe. Even little people like her and you and me, no matter our burden, can do things for the Kingdom of Light that can change the world.

Story has this profound effect on us. It can remind us of things we have forgotten and awaken our senses to see things we never saw before. G. K. Chesterton said that the reason apples of fairyland are golden is to catch our attention, to remind us about something in our world. We need to be amazed by golden apples in the fairy story because we forgot what it was like to be amazed by red ones in our own story. Stories help us remember things we have forgotten in God's fantastic world.

But they also help awaken our eyes to see things in ways we never saw before. Until my mid 20's, I pretended I was a solely cognitive, practical person. It was easier to swallow the Bible if it was in the abstract. Stories were wild, unpredictable, uncomfortably close to the heart. I loved that Jesus

was the Word, as long as the Word Made Flesh remained ethereal. I didn't get a love of story from the Gospels, however; I got it from reading other stories that massaged the story-lover side of me—a side that part of my culture, my church, and even my own family had numbed. As I read more stories, the more I fell in love with the narrative of the Bible. Now, when I see Gandalf vividly fighting the Balrog, it comes clearer to me to see Samson fighting the Philistines. Those two aren't parallel, of course, because one is a fiction and the other a fact, but Gandalf gives shoe-leather to how I enjoy the narrative. It helps me see. I see Gandalf lifting his staff to fight the mighty beast. I see Samson lifting the jawbone. I see a Centurion lifting the Cross. With Gandalf, I have hopes that someone would be as mighty as he. And then I turn to the narrative of the Gospels and suddenly realize, as if for the first time all over again, that there is One who is as mighty, and even mightier than he.

Stories convey truths deep within us so that we will enjoy the REAL STORY better. Stories can help us see that real life is of cosmic proportions, that there is a Universe-sized battle going on between good and evil. The battleground is for the hearts of men and women. We do not get to choose our burdens. But

we can choose to bear them well. Have you and I lost sight of the task God has placed before us? Have we forgotten what He wants us to remember? Does He want us to see afresh that He visited our planet for a purpose bigger and more beautiful than we can imagine? (Footnote 1: See 1 Cor. 2:9) And during His visit, He said that you may become part of His story. He says your burden will be light, because, on your journey through the valley of the shadow, He will bear it with you.

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