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A DEEP YEARNING



The world was fair, the mountains tall
In Elder Days before the fall.

(Gimli's song—Book II, Chapter 4)

There is a deep yearning among the Fellowship of the Ring, an unspoken longing for something long lost. None have known it in their lifetimes. Few can recite the tales of its splendor. But all desire its discovery and hope to play a part in its restoration.

Throughout their adventure, characters from Bilbo to Treebeard recite verses of what they sense is an epic tale being told, a tale in which their lives somehow play a part. Each song seems to be merely a fragment of a majestic symphony being written and conducted by an all-knowing composer. But, as the chorus of Gimli reveals, something is wrong. Part of the harmony isn't right, like a dissonant chord invading the sweet melody of life, refusing resolution.

Middle-earth is in its third age as the adventures of the Fellowship begin. There is considerable history to this world, as revealed in the legends of Elder Days. Elves, dwarves, men, and hobbits alike know that theirs is a story that predates the present scene, preserved and passed in tales of ancient lore. Gimli's chorus tells of life "before the fall" when the beloved homeland of his dwarf ancestors was full of splendor and light, not dark and foreboding as they find it now. Gimli's heart pines for glories long past when his people knew better days, before the fall of their blessed domain.

Finding God in The Lord of the Rings

A yearning heart is fitting. The wise know that before time was counted a rebellion occurred that brought evil into their world and introduced discord to the music of life. This rebellion was the driving force behind the song of the Dark Lord now heard in the march of orcs and the movements of the Black Riders. Awakened by the diminished sounds of beauty, honor, and goodness stubbornly pushing their way through the noisy clatter of evil, the inhabitants of Middle-earth hope for the day when all will again be set right.



You and I, like Gimli and others of Tolkien's world, long for better days. We somehow know that our world is less than it was made to be. And we hope that it will one day be set right again. In short, we yearn for the goodness that was "before the fall."

Why do we find it so difficult to accept the world as it is? Are we merely discontent, or is something more profound at work in our hearts? C. S. Lewis believed that our desire for something better is a gift, a way of reminding us of what it is we lost and what it is we hope to regain. "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists," Lewis explains. "A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."⁵

What is the real thing our yearnings suggest? Put simply,

it is goodness. We desire the kind of all-consuming goodness that we've never known but that once existed and will someday be restored.

We live in a broken world. Death, pain, sickness, and suffering were not part of life's original melody. These dissonant chords were first introduced when our race took the bait of temptation and fell from its former glory. Once upon a time, mankind was offered a choice. We could sing the good song of the great composer or follow the opposing melody of his enemy. We chose the latter. And when we rejected the good that God is, we embraced the bad that he isn't.

Evil entered Tolkien's world before the dawn of time. That story, told in the opening pages of *The Silmarillion*, sets the stage for choices later made by those who would inhabit Middle-earth. It starts with Ilúvatar, maker of all that would be. His first creations were Ainur, angelic beings described as "the offspring of his thought." To each Ainur, Ilúvatar assigned themes of music that would be sung for his honor and pleasure.

*Then Ilúvatar said to them: "Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music . . . ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song."*⁶

The beauty of their music is that for which all creation yearns. It is the original chorus which "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" as revealed

to a suffering Job (Job 38:7). It is the true melody, the “good” that once was. It is the world as it was intended before the birth of evil. The story continues:

But now Ilúvatar sat and hearkened, and for a great while it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws. But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself.⁷

Sadly, the sound of Melkor’s evil theme increased as some “began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first.”

Seldom have more graceful words been penned to reflect a Christian understanding of Satan’s revolt and its eventual impact upon God’s creation. Tolkien’s world, like ours, knows the dissonance of an opposing melody. It knows the insatiable appetite of a rebellion that seeks to destroy the good that should rightfully rule.

Tolkien saw our world as neither completely right nor completely wrong, but rather as a good that has been violated, a beauty marred. He realized that the only way we can understand that which occurs within time is to view it within the context of that which occurred before and beyond time.

Though our world is broken, there is good news. It will not always be so. The story of history, like that of Middle-earth, is progressing toward eventual redemption. Even that which seeks to undermine good will one day play a part in its restoration. As Ilúvatar foretold,

And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.⁸

And so Ilúvatar, after the pattern of the biblical Jehovah, produces a drama performed in the theater of time. Its story will become the visible expression of the Ainur's chorus, including the song of a simple hobbit and the discord of an evil rebel. And somehow, the former will resolve the latter.

Reflection

OUR HEARTS YEARN FOR THE GOOD THAT GOD IS.