

Mythical Tales and the Gospel

A myth is a fantastical and/or made up person, place, thing, or tale. It usually has the characteristics of being unbelievable and farfetched, but with an underlying ring of truth to it. Or at least, the enjoyable ones do. If it has no ring of truth to it, then how are we to relate to it? The best stories are the ones that stay with us, and in order to do that, they have to make us think. And in order to make us think, they have to give us something to think about. What do they give us to think about? Morals, truth, and the fight of good versus evil, are some of the more common themes; or things that “ring of truth”. Why are they so commonly found? Because they have survived the test of time; these themes are loved by peoples of all ages, and all generations. People can relate to these themes, and can make the story their own. That is why themes of this sort still have weight and can be found so often even in modern literature. People have taken ahold of them, and carried them along through the decades. The most popular myths carry these themes. Again, why? Because, the myths are stories that combine the childlike fantasy with the adult world. They bring the best of both worlds to the table, and that is why Myth is arguably the most enchanting of all the genres. Time itself will tell you of its worth, with the plethora of tales from centuries past.

But this begs the question, what is the best age for these tales? If it has both of the elements of a child’s wondrous bedtime tale (the fantastical element), and adult principles, morals, and themes, how is one supposed to enjoy the tale to its fullest? If you present it to a

child, then they will enjoy the whimsicality of the story, but not the underlying theme. If you give it to an adult, they will focus on the principles and morals presented in the story, and miss the wonder to be found in it. How is one to grasp the complete value of a good myth then?

The best age is in between the two, when one can appreciate both: adolescence. In adolescence one can appreciate the childlike aspect of the myth, because one has not yet left his childhood behind, but he is beginning to, in order to enter adulthood. Therefore, he has the ability to grasp the concrete aspect of the myth, as well as the wonder ingrained in it.

But the myth is a highly impractical thing, one might argue. Why should a youth spend his precious time in reading a myth? Should he not be devoting his time to reading more practical books: books that will teach him things such as how to fix a faucet, or how to be more productive in life? But what is adolescence for if not to prepare the person for adulthood? And what is more productive in preparation for adulthood than something that will be shaping a young person's thoughts and ideals and character? Myths are able to do this because they present hard questions in pretty packages, making a person think. Myth helps him to shape and form his opinions on hard things, such as morals, principles, and ethics. It can help him to take a firmer stance for good in the good versus evil fight, when presented with a hero who fights for good with his last breath, in spite of all the odds piled against him.

Why have Myths survived the passing of time, having such wonderful stories as the Greek classics for example? An author by the name of Rick Riordan has taken hold of these age-old tales and turned them into a modern set of young adult fiction that is sweeping the nation. Why are these stories still so wonderful to a new and modern generation? Because they have morals and principles and ethics: good versus evil, the hero defeating the villain,

defeating all of the odds set against him, overcoming all of the obstacles. But to take it a step further: why do these themes relate to us? I believe because they relate to something ingrained in us from the moment we're born. In Myth, Allegory, and the Gospel, it is put like this:

“-the fairy tale presents concepts and images which correspond to the basic universal symbols (or “Archetypes”) in man’s unconscious mind.” ¹

What is it that these myths bring up within us? What is it that is buried deep inside us, and comes alive when we read a classic myth? I believe it is the ingrained knowledge of man’s fallen nature and his desire for redemption. No one on this earth is perfect: every single one of us has messed up and done wrong in our life, often many times a day. When we read these wondrous tales about heroes on quests, who vanquish evil and save the day, redeeming themselves and their people, it appeals to us. We want to be loved and adored as these heroes are, and we want to be able to be redeemed as they are as well. But in this life, all you can do is

1. Fuller, Edmund, and Kilby, Clyde R. and Kirk, Russell and Montgomery, John. W. and Walsh, Chad (1974), Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien/C. S. Lewis/G.K. Chesterton/Charles Williams, BETHANY FELLOWSHIP, INC., Minneapolis, Minnesota, pg. 116-117

do your best, do as many good deeds as you can, and hope for the best to be redeemed in the other life, right? Rather, when you read these tales, it awakens that need for redemption. According to the Bible, Jesus Christ fulfilled when He died on the cross to save the world from their sins. I believe that Jesus Christ was God’s only Son, and because He lived a sinless life, He was able to take the sins of the world upon His shoulders and conquer death. He saves us and redeems us from an afterlife of eternal hell. He atones for all the wrongs we’ve committed

against a perfect and innocent God and acts as a bridge, allowing us into heaven if we accept that He is Lord and that we are sinful beings. He redeems us from our inadequacy and a life in hell.

This doctrine is called the *Gospel*. It is the basic dogma of the Christian faith. When we read myths, we expose a hole inside of us that yearns for the love and redemption we can never seem to acquire enough of. God fills this hole, and loves us more than anyone else ever can or will, and redeems us if we accept Him. God loves us more than anyone else – if He didn't, then why would He send His only Son to die for a world filled with sinful human beings?

If we look at both, how does the typical myth compare with the Gospel? Myths (typically), have a hero, a quest, something to be saved, something to be vanquished, and something to be gained. The Gospel has all of these. The hero (Jesus) comes down to earth in the form of a human, in order to destroy evil (our sins – what the Bible calls “wrong doings”) and to set His children free (us). We are to be saved from our sins (the thing to be vanquished) if we believe in Him and that He came to save us. In return, Jesus gains...well, nothing. He has nothing to gain from this endeavor, except the freedom of His people from their bondage. Jesus had no selfish ambitions when He came to save us. How could we know that? Because there were none; there was no reason why He would have come out of selfish ambition, because there was nothing for him to gain; no power, no glory, no wealth, no love. He had all of these to the infinite power in heaven, and yet He left them all behind to save us, His children and His people.

Another thing that most fairy tales have in common is when we reach the end and close

the cover, we give a little sigh because we wish we could live in the tale too; that it would come to life! But if it did, wouldn't that take most of the magic out of the story? I think this is debatable. On the one hand, if the tale were real, would that take most of the magic out of the story, simply because it is now a real thing? Now that it is a part of reality and no longer belongs to fantasy, is it any less special? Or is it even more miraculous now that we can see and touch and taste and feel this fantasy? But what story would we undoubtedly want to be true, more than one which says we are saved and loved by the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth!

People need the Gospel more than anything, and when a myth is able to relate this essential truth and help people, specifically adolescents, it becomes one of the most important and useful things in that person's life. It conveys a truth that has altered the course of the person's life forever for the better. Even if the myth only has a Christian theme to it with hints of the Gospel, if it gets the person thinking in that direction, then it has done its job.

When reading a myth or a story of most sorts, we tend to let our guard down. We are more open and receptive to what we hear, as opposed to if one were to read a religious text he was already biased against. Most people would not suspect myths to have as much power as they are capable of. Myths are dangerous when underestimated for this reason, as many ideas can slip through defensive walls and enter our minds without us even knowing. This is why it is very important to be careful with what you read, as this applies for plenty of other topics in literature that seep into your unsuspecting mind!

So, in conclusion, myths can be powerful things, even changing lives and saving souls, just from implanting the right idea; or, by pulling out an idea already embedded in our being

from birth. Relating to the desires all human being hold in common: the desire to be loved.

Myths can present ideas that stay with you forever. If these myths are the right kind, that is; the kind with the “ring of truth”, the moral code that everyone loves, where good defeats the evil and saves the day. We all want to be saved and loved. Jesus saves and loves us more effectively than anyone else ever could. And if a myth can implant this idea into one’s head, what else could it impart? Myths are powerful things, and should not be underestimated, or undervalued.

Sources:

1. Fuller, Edmund, and Kilby, Clyde R. and Kirk, Russell and Montgomery, John. W. and Walsh, Chad (1974), *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien/C. S. Lewis/G.K. Chesterton/*

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2. Smith, Mark Eddy (1967), *Tolkien's Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of The Lord of the Rings*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois

3. Brennan, Matt, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Allegory: An Analysis of Selected Narnia Chronicles', (1994-2013), <http://cslewis.drzeus.net/papers/lionwitchallegory.html>

4. Lewis, C. S. (1955), *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich

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