

# Hobbits, heroes and Jesus Christ: is Christianity just another myth?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 February 2006

Preacher: Jim Paul

[0:00] Good, good. That's right. I don't know who's a fan of Hobbits? Anybody? Not at all? No? I like the films.

! I like the films. Okay. And you've not read or seen the films? Did you? Oh, I do. I know. Lara, you're neither. No? No, I haven't read it. Okay. Okay.

Well, let me see how this goes then. It might be interesting if you haven't read either or seen the films, but we'll see how it goes. I guess what I wanted to do in this title is just pick up on the kind of increasing interest in stories and myths. And I suppose what started me thinking about it was actually films, which is the most popular medium for, I guess, cultural medium today. And in a way, like in films and in books as well, myths and epic stories from times past haven't been in favour for probably about 50 years or so.

And a lot of our literature in films have been more about kind of small stories about kind of more psychologically focused, and often about an anti-hero rather than a hero. And then in 2000 was the film *Gladiator*, which kind of, I don't know if anyone's seen *Gladiator*, who likes the film *Gladiator*. But it really sparked off this, you know, nobody thought you could make a film like *Ben-Hur*, the kind of epic Roman epic.

Nobody thought, you know, you could make another film like that. But *Gladiator* kind of proved everybody wrong, that it was a, you know, a film that recaptured, I suppose, an epic story, and with a hero rather than an anti-hero.

[2:03] And then we had a whole series, a whole series of different films echoing kind of mythic stories. And after that, we had Brad Pitt as Achilles in *Troy*. And then even worse, Colin Farrell with his blonde hair as Alexander the Great in Oliver Stone's *Alexander*. And then, and then Hollywood kind of revisited the King Arthur myth as well, Keira Knightley and Clive Owen as King Arthur and Guinevere.

And then as well, in the middle of that, Tolkien's epic myth really, which is that he designed *The Lord of the Rings* as a mythic tale to echo ancient myths that he loved, like the Norse myths from Scandinavia, was made into that series of three films and extremely successful. And then just at the end of last year, at the end of last year, he had C.S. Lewis's *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, made into a film as well.

And for many, that's kind of the mythic story of their childhood, and something that captured their imagination. And I want to talk quite a bit in this about Lewis and Tolkien's ideas about myth, and how they relate to Christianity.

Because both of them were Christians. Lewis was an Anglican, and Tolkien Catholic. And as you may know, they knew each other very well, and were in a group called the Inklings at Oxford University, where they shared their ideas. And so a lot of them developed this idea. And what I want to do is explore their idea of myths.

But I also want to relate it into Christianity. And another film that appeared in the same kind of time period, of this increasing interest in myth, was Nell Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*.

[3:49] And showing the last 24 hours of the life of Jesus. And it's apparently in terms of its kind of spin-offs and marketing and all that, the second highest grossing film ever, actually.

Made millions and millions for Nell Gibson. And I don't know if anybody knows any film buff would know the highest grossing film ever, in terms of all its spin-offs. And it's another mythic story.

Star Wars, yeah, good luck. Yeah, it is. That is. And I mean, Star Wars is a mythic story. If you notice at the beginning, when it scrolls up, it says, in a galaxy far, far, no, a long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.

So it's deliberately setting itself up as a mythic story. And from Neil Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, I guess many people's response to it is that it's perhaps another kind of myth, in the sense that it's something that happened far, far away in another time.

And perhaps, like King Arthur, it might have a vague kind of echo of some past event, but nothing really historical or true in it. It's a good story. And actually, if you look at *The Passion of Christ*, compared to, say, *The Lord of the Rings*, in a way, it's not a very attractive story, compared to some of those other epic kind of films that were made at the same time.

[5:09] So I wanted to discuss, really, and ask questions about, is Christianity just a myth or a mythic story, like all these other ones? And in this, we'll have a question time at the end, but feel free to kind of stop me and ask questions as we go along.

I'm very happy to make it much more of a dialogue, since we're a small group. That'd be good. And I'm going to give two parts of my answer to this. First of all, I want to say, yes, actually, that Christianity is a myth.

And that might freak out some of you and sound very odd. But I'll explain what I mean. And then I want to just draw out that it's more than a myth. It is a myth, but it's more than a myth.

And in these exploring the ideas, I said of Lewis and Tolkien. And I want to explain what I mean by a myth. And by a myth, I don't necessarily mean that it's an untrue, something's an untrue story.

I think the true meaning of the word myth is that it's a story from a long time ago, which is like a foundational story for a community. So you think of the Norse myths.

[6:13] They kind of explain for the Norse communities about who they are, where they came from, what their place is in the universe as people, what reality is made up of.

So our modern use of the word myth is something we think that's untrue. But I'm going to use it in that way, like the Greek myths or the Norse myths. And I want to say, yes, first it is a myth.

And then I want to say, well, I believe that Christianity is more than a myth. And that's where I'm going to go in the talk. So first of all, I think it's worth just thinking about what is a myth?

What is a myth? And what do I mean by a myth? And I've loved mythical stories, I think, all my life. In fact, I spend a lot of time reading myths still. And my parents both did classics at university.

And I suppose one of my first memories of them reading a story is *The Cyclops Adventure of Odysseus*, if you know that story, from the *Odyssey*, Homer's *Odyssey*, although in the children's version, thankfully, which captured that story.

[7:18] And then I think when I first learnt to read, well, actually the second book I ever read was *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*. I wasn't a Christian at the time, and I didn't get any of the kind of religious imagery or retelling of the Christian myth in that.

But I really enjoyed the story. It's a fantastic story. And then at nine, my mum, well, at eight she gave me *The Hobbit*, and then I loved that, so she gave me *The Lord of the Rings* to read, which took me a whole year to read as a nine-year-old.

I kind of battled through it, but I loved it. And for me, I think it's kind of the mythic story retold, and Tolkien designed it like that to be a myth.

Actually, he felt what he wanted to do was write a story that would replace for the English peoples their lost myths, because most of the kind of mythic legends of the English are actually lost.

*Beowulf* is one of the only stories that we have left, whereas we're not quite Scandinavian, but for the Scandinavian peoples they still have all this mythic lore preserved.

[8:22] And I desperately wanted *Lord of the Rings* to be true as a nine-year-old, because it was so much more exciting than *Epic of Gilgamesh*. And somehow, having read it, I wanted to be as heroic as Frodo, and have a quest or some adventure to go on.

And I think myths at their best kind of do that. If you read King Arthur, I remember I did a study group at La Bari where we read some myths together, and one of the students commented having read King Arthur, you read about all this adventure and this chivalry, and then you put it down, and

you have to go and do the washing up.

And how does it relate into our lives? So, I love myths, and these are the kind of elements that I think mythic stories have in them. The first thing that mythic stories have is a big story that goes behind the adventure.

And usually the big story is the battle between good and evil. That's a mythic element, the battle between good and evil. So, you can think of King Arthur as a myth. The story is about Christian King Arthur defending the land against the Danish pagans, and people invading and the kind of ogres and monsters, and making this safe place.

So, it's a battle between good and evil. Star Wars is the backdrop of the battle of the rebel alliance versus Darth Vader's evil empire, or the Emperor Palpatine's evil empire.

[9:49] And then in Lord of the Rings as well, it's the same idea of the epic myth, the battle of Gondor and Rohan, the free peoples against the creeping of darkness and evil of Mordor.

So, that's one thing, get the big story. And then against the big story, you have a little story. And although I see many myths have heroes in them, Lancelot or Aragorn or Achilles, I think the best myths work where you have ordinary people who are involved in the big story.

And Lord of the Rings obviously has the Hobbits who are designed or created to be your really ordinary, very ordinary person. Tolkien's idea behind the Hobbits, or his inspiration for them, was seeing your average British Tommy in the trenches in the First World War, as you fought in the trenches for some of the war.

And seeing your kind of average, you know, just Joe Bluntz, but in his sense doing something heroic, just by doing his duty. So there are these little people.

And the little people in the story have a quest to go on for an adventure. And the adventure is actually the whole of the big story depends upon the outcome of this little story involving the little people.

[11:08] So in the Lord of the Rings, you get the Hobbit, Frodo. He takes the ring on this journey to Mount Doom to destroy it. But really having no idea actually when he takes the ring, and for most of the story, how important his journey is.

He has very little idea of it. But it's through the faithfulness and the perseverance of these people that the whole of the big story depends. And then another element of myth is always myths are full of great tragedy as well.

There's always great tragedy when it appears that evil has won. And in Lord of the Rings, you get quite a few moments of tragedy. Perhaps one of the most moving is when Gandalf is killed.

And he's the one who will guide them through on this quest. Perhaps he's killed by the Balrog in the mines of Moria. The Star Wars has that moment of catastrophe when Obi-Wan is killed by Darth Vader in the first of the original trilogy of films.

And then so there's this moment when all hope is lost and everything evil appears to have won. But then there's also a twist in a story. And a twist. And Tolkien called this a eucatastrophe.

[12:22] If you get a word. Eucatastrophe is Greek for good. So catastrophe is obviously a bad tragedy. And the eucatastrophe is... And he describes it like this. He said it's the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.

And one gets many of those in the greatest myths. And in the telling of these modern myths, we see eucatastrophes. For example, Gandalf the Grey is killed by the Balrog.

But he comes back as Gandalf the White. And there's that amazing moment when the remaining parts of the Fellowship of the Rings see him again. And he's bigger and stronger and more powerful.

Or Star Wars captures it a little bit with Obi-Wan. He's killed by Darth Vader. But then meets Starwalker here. And Obi-Wan still talking to him in the force and the power.

And he's now stronger than he ever would have been if he'd be left alive. Frodo does make it to Mount Doom. And throw the ring in despite all the catastrophes that happen on the way.

[13:27] So those are the elements of myth. A big story. Good versus evil. A little story. A little people. A catastrophe. And then a sudden twisting. Which turns in a sense the evil into good.

And the last thing I just wanted to say about myths. Is that myths also form a community. The idea of a myth is that it helps people understand who they are. And their place in the world. And why they're here.

The Greeks knew this very well. And they read the Iliad and the Odyssey. It was actually civic duty. So if you had been Greeks in Athens. Before Christ. You would have had to have come as a civic duty.

To listen to the Iliad and the Odyssey being read. Or some fierce punishment probably would have befallen you. Anyway the men would have come. And the idea was that. Actually if you listened to the myth.

What would have happened is that. You would have understood what the culture is all about. You would have understood the values. And how to act. What it meant to be brave.

[14:25] For example. By looking at the story of Achilles. By Odysseus what it meant to be cunning. Cunning is a virtue actually used in the right way. And even to have a sense of humour. And make a charity.

You'd learn from the stories. And near us. Where I live in Hampshire's Winchester. In Winchester you can visit. King Arthur's round table.

If you are ever passing by. And it's in the great hall of Winchester. The medieval hall. But if you do visit it. You need to be ready. Because it's not King Arthur's original round table.

If you had one. But it's made in the 12th century. By the British king Edward I. And but his idea is. And in fact Henry VIII. Then repainted it.

And probably painted his own face. As the face of King Arthur. And the idea. But he's obviously saying in that. Is making a very public statement. Is I am a king like King Arthur.

[15:21] That's what he's saying. Through adopting in a sense. This myth for himself. And appropriating it. And I want to be a Christian king. Who will defend his land against. The outsiders.

Or that kind of idea. Whatever. However he saw it. And you know. I want a new age of chivalry. And you kind of. And the values of King Arthur. So. In that sense.

That shows how the British myth of King Arthur. Formed for later generations. As well again. The community and their ideas. Good. So that's why I say. First of all. Christianity is a myth.

This is why I want to say it. Because. I think it has lots of elements. Of all the wonderful elements of myth. In it. And. I just want to tell you a little bit. About how I see. The Christian story.

As a myth. And how it links into that. Picture that I've given you. Of what a myth is. Because. Because Christianity has a big story. As well. It has this big story. Of a creator.

[16:18] Who made us. Who made the world. In which we live. And everything in it. And he made. Human beings. A man and a woman. To live within it. And full of wonder. And beauty.

And goodness. And then. Just like in the myth. There's this catastrophe. Everything goes wrong. And. We don't get. You know. A full picture.

Of how it goes wrong. But it seems that. There's an angel. Or some supernatural being. Not content to be a creature. Of the creator. Of the creator. But starts to envy. The creator.

What he does. And want to kind of. Make things. Of his own. For himself. And then he starts. To hate the creator. And. His only desire. Becomes to twist. And distort.

And destroy. This beautiful creation. And he lures. The man and the woman. Into his plans. And he lures the man. And the woman. And will give you. Power. And everything you want.

[17:14] And in return. For their allegiance. Uh. But of course.

Everything then. Begins to fall apart. Everything appears lost. Um. This. Battle of good and evil. Everything appears lost.

And the whole. Of creation. Descends into chaos. And so do people. And. And their relationships. To one another. There's a promise. Um. There's a promise. In Christianity.

That's made. One day. A king will come. Who will make. Everything new. it good again in the way it should be and make the man and woman in right relationship again with one another and with the creator and so then in the bible in a sense it switches into this little story, you've got the big story, this titanic struggle God and evil good and evil and then the little story starts and Christianity focuses on this man, this one man who gets the promise that the king will come through him and his descendants and then as you read the story, the myth more and more the man has children and the

family comes and then they turn into a nation, but then again and again in the story you get this battle of good and evil and the evil tries to stamp out this line that we become the coming king because if we can stop this family and destroy it, then we destroy the promise if the king is promised to this family and we wipe them out or this nation we wipe them out, then there's no promise left and evil will win and there's moments again and again when evil seems to have won in the story, the myth of Christianity you get this nation that forms from this the man and you suddenly get them taken into exile as slaves in Egypt and then the Pharaoh says let's kill all the children, all the boy children no more children, no more promise later on the Babylonians capture them, take them into slavery raise their town to the ground no more nation and yet somehow this promise just goes on and on and on through all generations and then comes the moment in history when when the time comes for the promised king to arrive and this is the moment when you get the most unexpected twist and I think for those of us who are familiar with the Christian story maybe we need to re-experience this as a real twist actually in the story is that you expect the king is going to come and he's going to put everything right and here he's going to come with his angels and his armies and actually suddenly what you get is a little baby born in a manger and I think father of two boys when they're tiny like this big and they in winter get a cough and you realise they're kind of coughing and spluttering at night and got a temperature and you realise how fragile that little baby's life is and then and then you think that the creator actually his promise is going to come through this little fragile thing and that's how it happens and once again evil tries to stamp him out the king of the land tries to kill off this baby and orders the soldiers to kill everybody in the town where that baby's born all the babies all the baby boys but warned in a dream the parents of the child escape with him and then we get a moment just like in all myths when this hope the promise remains hidden away

Jesus remains hidden as a carpenter in a little village and it's just like Aragorn in the Lord of the Rings the ranger who's the king to come remains hidden as this kind of shadowy character in the wastelands or in Star Wars Luke Skywalker he's the one that's hidden away in Tatooine on this little planet on the edges of the solar system somewhere until the time is right for the return of the king and then in the myth we get this the hope starting to grow and we get the king comes and he has amazing power people who are possessed by demons are healed with a word people who are dead are raised from the dead and there's just this unleashing of amazing power but and then we have the ultimate catastrophe is evil hates this king and gets the king evil actually gets the king the civil institutions hate him the religious institutions fear him and they get him and they kill him they kill the king and they nail him to a cross the catastrophe of the promised king for thousands of years and then he's killed and then you get the ultimate eucatastrophe the turning the twisting again at that one moment when evil thought that it had won it's actually lost that it did in the one thing that it wanted to do it actually achieved the ultimate good purposes of the creator and the beginning of the restoration and so the king rises from the dead and just like Gandalf

[22:10] Gandalf the grey dies but he comes back as Gandalf the white and stronger more powerful unstoppable actually you get an Obi-Wan killed by Darth Vader but he comes back as this kind of part of the force and he's actually much more powerful than he was before and the king rises from the dead and his kingdom will grow and grow and grow until everything is set right it's the ultimate eucatastrophe so that's why I say yes Christianity is a myth in that sense but in fact it is the myth and this is what Tolkien and C.S. Lewis described it as being the myth and their idea which I love is that all the heroism and all the beauty and all the love found in all the myths that we enjoy are only there because they actually echo the Christian story that was their idea that even though they were written before the Christian story like everything from the myth that we love that is true and good and beautiful is there because it actually echoes the true myth of the Christian story someone summarised it in this and kind of quoting Tolkien but just adding a little bit the gospels contain a fairy story even the sum total of all fairy stories rolled together

I like it if one can just allow us to use that language fairy story even the sum total of all the fairy stories rolled together so I know that I've asked these people if they like Lord of the Rings and none

of them have read it but I'm not sure for you but lots of times great well yeah and I think I think it's amazing I mean if you love the Lord of the Rings then I would say to people if you love it then you love it because actually it's got all the elements of the true story in it and that Tolkien himself would say that although he didn't set out to say I'm going to write it's a Christian story and of the kind of this is what I'm trying to do the story just came out of him creatively but he said because he was a believer himself he knew that this was the true and the good story and the beautiful one and it just came out in the story of writing it and it connected in with that so Christianity is a myth so I'll say first of all the myth and

I think we need to re-experience it sometimes as a story as a real it's an exciting story actually very exciting but this is where I just want to leave in the it's not just a myth it's not just a myth but it transcends myth but it's also a fact because other myths happen where and when we read the stories by these stories they're not placed in time and history and geography but the gospel is a myth that actually enters real time and real space and Tolkien described it like this he said this story by which he meant the gospel is supreme and it is true legend and history have met and fused legend and history have met and fused and I just want to just look at the central event of the Christian story which is the coming of the promised king and just link it into history to show you how this myth actually happened in real space in real time in real geography in real time so when we read in the Christian story of the coming of the promised king he's born into real history and geography in a real place called Bethlehem and we know where it is today in a real time we read in the bible it was during the censor of Caesar Augustus he lived from 8 to 9 BC

Herod the king Herod the great was king he died in 4 BC I was just listening to this amazing BBC program Anthony you're the astronomer here but they were it was a historian professor of history of astronomy and someone had written in and asked is there any truth behind the Christmas star appearing and this idea of the Christmas star and this history of historians just went through all the amazing conjunctions of star events that happened at that time including the appearance what's a new star called when it appears a supernova including the appearance literally of a new star a supernova noted down historically by Chinese astronomers around what appeared I think around 6 BC something like that and appeared brightly in the sky for several months and so again one reads something that seems so mythical the appearance of a new star and all these conjunctions of planets actually happened against the backdrop of the star sign of

Aquarius which was the star sign associated with the Jews so for any kind of astronomers or astrologers of ancient Babylon or whoever looking at these they saw these amazing signs and said this is happening in the star sign of the Jews let's go there so it's real time and real history real events even those kind of amazing things that just see star appearing and then the coming king or the king the promised king lives in real history and geography when you read the gospels accounts of Jesus it's describing a real culture it describes really the way that people interrelated that describes a cultural background of the Pharisees and the Sadducees properly when we read of these amazing things they did like casting out demons from people it happened in a real place gathering and you can go and visit there today or when he talked to a woman in a well in the village of

[28:19] Sychar you could go and sit on the very same well as it happened it's not a myth but you don't know where and when but actually it happened in real history in real time in real places and then when the promised king dies again it happens in real ways he's crucified the account is very real I'm trained in medicine and the account of him being stabbed in the side in the water blood and water flowing out is a perfect description of what happens to people who die being tortured and then from asphyxiation and how the plasma and the red cells separate and you often get a plural fusion developing in that kind of element it's a brilliant it's a real description of someone dying and he died in a real time Pontius Pilate was governor AD 26 to 37 Pontius Pilate was governor Herod Antipas was king of Galilee he stopped being king in AD 39 so we can place it in real history in real time and then the most mythical event of all the ewe catastrophe the resurrection of this king from the dead again it happened in real space in real time it was three days after the crucifixion after the

Passover in a real place a tomb in a garden real people saw it the gospels tell us there are 500 people who saw him after the resurrection you can go and ask them it doesn't hide this away he describes it's no hallucination he talked ate drank walked with people and these people actually believed because what they've seen in real history that they would they believed that when this king said I'll come back again and make everything new they believed that that would happen in real history and just as I close this section I just wanted to talk lastly about it's not just in the gospels that the life of this promised king is recorded I don't have time to go into all the details now but the Jewish historian Josephus records the historical life and death of Jesus and notes that his resurrection was rumoured although he himself doesn't believe that it happened the Roman historian

Tacitus again records the historical person Jesus from writing in the second century AD and his death and in the second century Justin Martyr a Christian taken to Rome and appearing before the emperor at his trial appealed to the fact he said if you want to know why I'm a Christian and why I believe these things and why I won't give it up look in your own records this is his offense look in the records of Pontius Pilate in Rome which you keep which tell the story of this divine and what happened with Pontius Pilate and him so again and again this real history let me just check how I'm doing time wise I'll just talk for another five minutes if that's ok does anyone want to stop there and ask any questions let's just finish ok we'll just finish now I just wanted to at the end really raise the story raise the question of why is it important that

Christianity is both the way I've expressed it myth and fact together because I think as Christians a lot well I'm a Christian I don't know about all of you guys but if you a lot of us might feel more comfortable with being given a textbook of theology as opposed to a Bible to base our faith on something that's very clear this is the way it is God has these characteristics and these attributes etc but it's rather embarrassing for us as modern people that we're given this book full of stories look at the Bible it's really a book it is story from beginning to end even the letters in the New Testament which are kind of the most un-story like it's still part of a story written by somebody to somebody in a certain place for a certain reason often in response to a problem or a letter from them and so why does the Bible a story it's quite embarrassing for us in some senses that we've got a book full of giants and legends and heroes and murder and adultery and it would be much nicer if we have a nice systematic theology textbook to give and I really want to take you into the way stories really help us unite our knowledge as human beings we find it difficult as human beings to know things in a kind of integrated way we know things with our minds sometimes and some of us know things in our experience and it's hard to bring those together but what reading a story does is it really enables you to bring things together from your abstract knowledge and your experience and if you think of it as reading when you read

Lord of the Rings if someone said to you what is bravery and I'll see the question what does it mean to be brave and you can give me an answer anybody got an answer what does it mean to be brave yeah yeah yeah that's good yeah kind of that's like kind of overcoming your fear or pain or something isn't it to do something okay so you've got a kind of now we've got an analytical if you like knowledge oh that's what bravery is in the English Oxford diction able or ready to face and endure danger or pain so you think oh now I know what it is but then you read the Lord of the Rings and you travel with Frodo all the way to Mount Doom and then if someone's to say to you now do you understand what bravery is you'd say wow now I really am beginning to understand what it is what it means to be brave when you journey with him through the story but in a totally different way it's not just a head knowledge you almost feel like you know I actually understand have experienced something of bravery in the story if you read a really good story a really good adventure you feel all the emotions of the characters you feel the bravery sadness the fear the hope and you actually participate in the story for those people who love Lord of the Rings and if you put it down you actually feel like you've gone all the way to

[35:13] Mount Doom with Frodo you feel like you've journeyed with him so there's something about a story which actually helps unite our knowledge of something and then I think about the Gospels and I think about a statement because obviously Christianity contains lots of propositional statements like God is love God is love and you say what does it mean for God to be love ok to know that I've got this little box in my head God is love and then you begin to read the Christian story and think oh you know God created us good and you're able to enjoy the world and experience it

but we've all gone off on our own tracks and then God is love means that he actually will send his son to rest in us and what is that love like well when a woman is caught in adultery this is the way Jesus was with her and then he ate with the prostitutes and the outcasts and now I'm beginning to understand a little more about love and then I read about him dying on the cross for me and now

I'm beginning to get the idea and almost experience love and what it means for God to be love in a new way in a way that if I had a textbook of theology where God is love and he's actually so love is one of them it doesn't quite do the same but we need that knowledge but we need to know how it all fits into reality and that's what a story does and I think the last thing that a story does is actually when you read the Lord of the Rings or if you've read a really good story of King Arthur there's a part of you at the end of the story that wants to be like the character in the story the hero I don't know if you've ever felt that you finish the story and you think I want to be braver now or like that girl saying she just read about the chivalry I want to be chivalrous but now I've got to do the washing up and I think we actually get that same call from Jesus actually as we read the Gospels it's a call as we participate in it as a story we get a call saying come and follow me and actually it's the one story that we really can join in if you try to live in the Lord of the Rings you are not a very sad person if you really try and live in that kind of story

I have to confess that I am a member of the Tolkien Society when I was 12 or 13 and I used to dress up as a hobbit and I even had some friends who had a shaggy dog and when they shaved it they would give me the hair and I could glue it on my feet with Evo stick and it was lovely for it as a child to do but there are some adults now who still try to live in the Lord of the Rings and it's actually a very sad thing it's in fact an escape from reality and there are other people who try to live in the true story but side in a sense with the evil of that true story and live in that and find something that's true that actually is dark and not life and what Jesus does as we read of life and he tells us in the Gospels is he calls us to follow him and find life find ourselves in that story his story the end of it is that all things will be made new as he calls you to say will you be a part of that actually making things new in your life in your relationships in your studies even in the way you do the washing up my most heroic event of the week is often doing washing up but I say it's a truly heroic event because it's doing something

I can free my wife to have you know fifteen minutes of peace and rest and so it becomes a heroic event in the making all things new and that's what the Gospel does it's perfect seriously let's call it perfect fact and perfect myth but together it makes something that actually reality comes to us a story we can live in and take a full path in that's all I had to say let's have some questions anyone will just think for a minute I'll just have a few questions about how that all fits together yeah what I'm doing what I'm doing is kind of a statement from your husband something that's not true but sometimes it's kind of a pretty kind of a pretty good it's a good conclusion story and think yeah I'm going to what about that

I'm going to see you going that way and see you see you going that way can I imagine when you know do you do you do you do you do things so it's kind of it's taking some reality into this story I guess just two things one is I think when you read the Lord of the Rings and say I want to be brave I would say you're actually saying something very Christian there actually you know because it's good to be brave in a Christian sense when we all in life have to go through things that are painful and difficult and somehow things we don't want to do so I think that in a sense one you know and Tolkien would see that as well that you are sensing their call to be to be Christ-like actually when one feels that call from Frodo to be brave but I think if you kind of try to live in the world of the Lord of the Rings totally then you'd be going into escapism

[41:23] I think the difference with that and what Jesus does is he doesn't call you out of the world he calls you back into the world to actually face all the difficulties and fallenness and your own brokenness but to let you know to with him kind of join in in actually making things new in your your own story of your life so he's not calling you to retreat into something but actually to re-engage do his own words you know I haven't called you out of the way into the world not to be in the world but not after being in it but doing something that's truly kind of redeeming and that has taken me very little thing doing the washing up

you know actually is very is a heroic you know I do see it as a heroic event in that sense loving somebody you know when you begin to understand what Jesus means by love which is something towards really wanting for someone else what is truly best for them you know rather than your own agenda you sort of meet people with our own agenda you know

I want them to be something for me but really letting someone else and design what God desires for them and in them and for them to be more and more human than loving someone in very simple acts you know can be making a cup of tea again that's a kind of redemptive event I see you know that's the kind of thing that Jesus would call us to do I'm not talking about you know becoming missionary or anything like that I'm just talking about everyday moment by moment you know is that beginning to get there or is there more questions yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah no that's absolutely good point there are many versions of Christianity which can become escapes aren't they whether it's into a kind of yeah that kind of you know

God will give me everything I want or or it could be a kind of ascetic you know escape into some kind of pietistic you know meditation or something like that which could take you out of the world thank you but some kind of if I can't live in a unfortunate some of some of some of some of Yeah, yeah, yeah.

This is the best description of reality that I can, you know, that I've encountered actually. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[45:16] There's that kind of, some people express it as the now and the not yet, this time that we live in, when we begin to experience some of what it means as Jesus' kingdom grows, but it's still the not yet.

And so, very much, I think Tolkien's image of Frodo was about, you know, he exemplifies with me the perseverance of me. And Sam is another character, he's the encourager, he encourages the other one to persevere and sometimes we both need those roles to play for one another.

And that can be what, you know, in Sam you see what it truly means to love somebody else as well, don't you? Be the encourager and make sacrifices of self. Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Do you think Christians in the 1905 story of the universe? Yeah, yeah. Some of you think you want to see the universe is very quick.

Yeah, yeah. And you can see the universe is very good. Yeah. And you can see the universe is very good. Yeah, yeah. And you can see the universe is very good.

[46:26] Yeah, yeah. But they don't understand the scriptures are very good. And they're very good. Do you think you need to tell it better?

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think we've actually lost, many churches, many of us have lost the story from Christianity and we've reduced it to a set of abstracted truths.

Like a textbook. Yeah, like a textbook. We made it like a textbook. For many of the people growing up in Christian families and going to Sunday school, you kind of taught it like a textbook or something.

And it becomes, you know, let's face it, you know, it's easier to preach a sermon from Paul's kind of more analytical text than it is from Judges and Samson, kind of, you know, with this bizarre story. And yet, I see I'm finding those kind of stories more and more exciting to let them be stories. And I think that's one of the things we need to do. I'm particularly interested in children and kind of how they're, well, actually my wife is not interested in children and how they, their spiritual formation, and I've learned a lot from her about it.

[47:39] But one of the things, I remember a student I had at Nibri, who was really turned off for the Bible, and he said, whenever I read the Bible, all I hear is my dad's voice in my mind telling me what the verse means.

And I said to him, well, how can I not do that for my children? And he said, don't teach them theology, just read them the stories. My children, you know, the oldest is five, and they engage with the stories brilliantly.

But, you know, I don't, I'm not teaching them the whole theological framework. There'll come a time when you need to, you know, when you need to, as you grow and you develop, and there's a right time, you know, to begin to become more analytical.



we can struggle to relate to it in a way.

The other bit of their writings that I find really amounted to be helpful is Tolkien's I don't know if you've ever seen the Silmarillion which is his book of the first age of Middle and the creation story that he tells in that is wonderful, it's the way it picks up and helps imaginatively explore the Christian creation story.

[54:52] I really recommend those this reading. For me they've really reinvigorated my faith actually, even reading King Arthur or something.

What are your Danish myths? What do you have in Holland? You don't have, you haven't got a, you're like us, you lost your myths like us.

Even reading King Arthur gives you this wonderful sense of things. Perseverance, honesty, values, and moving.

Imaginatively helps you to fill out one's picture of Christ. I think it's, I'd say it's very helpful.

One thing we do at Libri every week, where I work, is we share a film and have a discussion. And one of my colleagues show Batman Begins this week, the latest Batman film.

[56:15] And they had the most wonderful discussion about themes of what needs to be justice and revenge. And what the Batman character learns about those in the film.

And, you know, so that can link in with a kind of more idea topic. There are many films which give you wonderful kind of pictures of Christ.

I don't know if you've ever seen the film Heaven. Have you seen Heaven? It had Cate Blanchett in it. And the guy, Tommy Talker directed it. And it's this film, and you can watch it at one level and just, you know, it's a good film.

And kind of quite exciting, kind of, thrill effect. But the director, very, this huge amount of, he's not a Christian, he becomes a poet.

Well, he wrote the screenplay. And not the director, so someone else directed it, but the screenplay writer. And there's a huge amount of Christian symbolism in it all about. And the fact that, you know, one of the figures is just this Christ figure.

[57:21] Once someone explains it to you, you can see it. So I think it's really useful for connecting with people and helping them. You know, many people won't connect with the Bible, or they won't connect with Christianity.

They won't want to, but love connecting with the film. Do you think, why did you ask the question, what's your idea behind it? Yeah.

I think it's kind of, really, to what extent you've used someone else. Yeah. Because above, not really above that, but instead of... Right, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think it's... Is it kind of concerned that Star Wars becomes a truer myth than the Bible?

[58:19] Yeah, yeah. I suppose it's in which direction we're pointing, isn't it?

We can use something to point to the Gospels and Jesus, or we can use it to point just to the thing itself. I mean, Paul in Athens, I don't know if you know, in Acts 17, he appeared in the Areopagus before the Philosophers, and there he connected with them.

He said, you know, I've been walking around your city, and I've seen all these statues, and I've seen all these very religious people, and I saw a statue to the unknown God. But let me now tell you who that God is, because he's around us, and we live and believe and have our being in him, and even as one of your own poets was said.

And he quotes one of the Greek poets. So he's connecting in there totally with them. And it's very interesting, actually, in his Gospel presentation there, he doesn't mention the name of Jesus at all. Because, in fact, earlier on he said, you know, I preach Jesus in the resurrection, and the Greeks, people in the Marthas, and, you know, he's preaching two gods, because Iesus and Iostarsis, he's two different gods.

[59:44] He said, no, no, you've got the wrong idea. And they said, well, come talk to us in the Areopagus. But when he goes there, he dispenses with those two words, because they didn't connect Jesus and the

resurrection. And he says, yeah, and there was a man, he describes that, a man appointed by God, to judge everyone who God rose from the dead.

So he gives kind of retails of Christian story, that he uses things he's seen in their culture, the statues and their own parents. So I think there's actually a biblical kind of mandate, in that sense, for using cultural symbols, but using them to point to the truth.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Yeah, I mean, the idea of the fourth being, you know, it's a kind of, has a more Eastern, doesn't it, Buddhist kind of, you know, one might say monistic type of kind of thing. Everything's one, that kind of idea. One could then, yeah, critique that, or watch a film, you know, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, I don't know if you've seen that film, Chinese kind of martial arts language, for example, it's a beautifully made film.

[61:08] But in that, you know, there's this strong kind of ideal of love, but, and, and ultimately, they enter into this, kind of, an Eastern solution to it, but it, but it, it, even the characters in that, can show you that that doesn't work, and they're kind of pointed, so you could use that to point to something else, and then, you know, how, how Christianity does actually, um, provide you with this view of a world where it's fallen, and one, you know, hates things, but also, it's, you know, it's been redeemed, and there's so much to love, and take part in, you know, so, yeah, you, you know, you're right, you're right, it needs to have a critique, and, um, you know, but also connecting with people, yeah, yeah, and, and films are, films are kind of the way, I think, in the sense of, you know, people, everyone goes to watch films, and many of your fellow students, will probably watch, I don't know if the Brie students have anything to go by, at home, watch like, four, five, six movies a week, I don't know if that, yeah, yeah,

I don't know, yeah, right, yeah, hey, what's it there? But, yeah, it's worth, yes, I mean, we get so many coming, you know, they come with their laptop, and a stack full of DVDs, and, to watch, and, and, they're very deprived, so I think film is a real way, there is actually a real way to community, but some books, and, as well, and, and, yeah, TV, TV, everything.