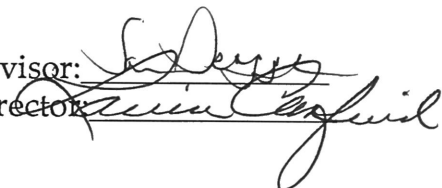


The Strength of the Weak
and
the Struggle about the Impossible
in
The Lord of the Rings

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The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is for the Fellows Advisor and the bottom signature is for the Honors Director. Both signatures are written in a cursive style.

Acknowledgement

It is a rare moment in the life of the common man--or woman--to be given the opportunity by society to publicly "acknowledge" those people who--in one way or another--have helped to accomplish the realization of the individual and his goals, dreams, and expectations. I take this opportunity gladly, for much of what may be called "good" and "worthwhile" in my life has been shaped by people--individual human beings--whose very presence and example have inspired and given me hope to continue, even when there is so much hopelessness and selfish despair in the world.

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Abstract

In his personal writings, as well as in much of his fiction, J.R.R. Tolkien often expressed the paradoxical belief that the 'wheels of the world' are often turned, not by the great, the powerful, or the mighty, but rather, by those who appear in the eyes of the world as being weak, and not worth the mentioning nor the notice of the society at large. The following analysis discusses Tolkien's exposition of this motif of 'the unknown and the weak' in his trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, its relation with some of his other works, and some of its parallels with *the Bible*.

Tolkien presents the dilemma of the individual who encounters "impossible odds," but who nevertheless must strive to overcome these out of a sense of responsibility. The burden of the weak is to take upon himself this responsibility or quest--however foolish and absurd it might seem to the eyes of reason--because there is no one else who may attempt it; it has been appointed to him by a supreme being. This means that in order to walk to the end of his life's road, the individual must be willing to sacrifice and surrender all--to deny himself--even if this means suffering, great mortification, or even death; even then, because of the individual's inherent weakness before the forces he is encountering, all rationale points out in the direction of failure and certain death: there is no hope. Yet, at the very moment of greatest despair and hopelessness, "somehow," a glimmer of hope returns to the weak and unknown when out of the depths of the heart comes a call--a clamor--to the infinite, to the divine, to the supreme being.

The analysis concludes by making the parallel with the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his quest to overcome the impossible: to die and resurrect so that humanity may be redeemed. Love, it is concluded, is the ultimate source of strength for the weak: love for one's fellow being and love for God. It is only through the strength of love that an individual may master the will to struggle against impossible odds.

Introduction: The Burden of the Weak

Some years before his death in 1971, J.R.R. Tolkien told an interviewer the following: "I have always been impressed, "he said," that we are here surviving, because of the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds."¹ In much of his writings, Tolkien manifests this impression; that is, "that the great policies of world history, 'the wheels of the world', are often turned not by Lords and Governors, even gods, but by the seemingly unknown and weak."² Such is the case in "the Story of Beren and Luthien the Elfmaiden"--one of the stories within Tolkien's larger work, *Silmarillion*--where a mortal, with the help of a mere elfmaiden, accomplishes what great armies and warriors have failed to do, to penetrate the stronghold of Morgoth and to wrest one of the Silmairilli from the Enemy's crown. In *The Lord of the Rings*, this motif of the "unknown and the weak" confronting and overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles is further explored, becoming a dominant theme central to the understanding of Tolkien's work.

In the Ring trilogy, Tolkien places the individual in a personal quest to fulfill a responsibility to walk--to the end--the path apportioned to him by what is often referred to (within the trilogy) as "chance" or "fortune," but what also is implied (and this is confirmed in the *Silmarillion*) to be the design of a one and greater supreme being. At the same time, Tolkien places great emphasis on the freedom of the individual to accept or reject this responsibility; it is never implied in Tolkien's work that the individual is forced to follow the path of her life; it is always made clear that if the individual follows the apportioned pathway, she does so of her own free will. Thus, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien gives paramount importance to what he calls the "fidelity of will" of the individual as he strives to go on with his

life, fulfilling his responsibility, for it is up to the individual to have the willingness to continue with his struggle and not falter at it.³ The intensity and difficulty of this struggle increases as the individual encounters greater and more difficult obstacles, until there comes a point where the obstacles are such that it is deemed *impossible* by reason that they may ever be surmounted.

Such is the dilemma of the individual in Tolkien's Ring Trilogy. The author presents the reader with characters whose lives --as individuals--have led them to accept a particular duty and purpose, and who--while in the quest to achieve this--realize that it is hopeless to go on, that they are "against impossible odds," and that it would seem rather absurd and foolish not to abandon the "quest," resigning themselves to the forces and power of what they cannot overcome: the impossible. Nevertheless, regardless of the odds against them, or of the unreasonableness of their endeavor, they struggle on.

For Frodo Baggins--as well as for every other character in the trilogy--it is impossible for anyone to be able to throw the one Ring of Power into the Cracks of Doom:

The Ring was unbreakable by any smithcraft less than his own [Sauron's]. It was indissoluble in by fire, save the undying subterranean fire where it was made--and that was unapproachable, in Mordor. Also, so great was the Ring's power of lust, that anyone who used it became mastered by it; it was beyond the strenght of any will (even his own) [Sauron's] to injure it, cast it away, or neglect it.⁴

Yet, Frodo finds himself in a quest to do exactly that: to overcome the impossible, to accomplish what no one can conceivably achieve --not even the strongest of beings in Middle-earth--much less he, Frodo Baggins, a mere hobbit from the Shire. Nevertheless, this is *his* quest, as an individual, as a being from Middle-earth, as Frodo Baggins; but it is a quest that forsakes the counsel of reason, for it trusts neither strength nor wisdom, and instead places its faith in the paradoxical belief

that the weak and unknown can and often do turn the great policies of world history:

The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deed that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.⁵

However, exactly how it is that the weak manage to turn the "wheels of the world" is not disclosed nor satisfactorily explained at this point by Elrond nor by any of the other members of the Council that meets at Rivendell. What they do know for certain is that the growing threat of Sauron and his dark forces must be dealt with, or else the whole of Middle-earth may very well fall under the dominion of the Dark Lord.⁶

Frodo has the Ring of Power, but they realize that even if they were to use the Ring to defeat Sauron, that sooner or later another Dark Lord would arise--no matter how good the original intentions--because of the Ring's immense power to corrupt the heart of those who use it to achieve their own ends. They find no solution in casting the Ring away into the depths of the sea, for--as Gandalf says--the shape of the earth may eventually change, and the Ring be found again, bringing with it the lust for power that would give rise to more Dark Lords. Therefore, the only solution is to attempt to do what is deemed impossible: to cast the Ring into the Cracks of Doom, where it was made. The idea becomes even more absurd and foolish when Frodo--a halfling--volunteers to carry the burden of taking the Ring, and the Council, although not without the dissent of Boromir, endorses him as the Ring bearer;.

Elrond raised his eyes and looked at him, and Frodo felt his eyes pierced by the sudden keenness of the glance. 'If I understand aright all that I have heard, 'he said,'I think that this task is appointed to you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will. This is the hour of

the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the great. Who of all the Wise could have forseen it? Or, if they are Wise, why should they expect to know it, until the hour has struck?'

But it is a heavy burden. So heavy that none could lay it on another. I do not lay it on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right...' (I, p.454-55)

Before the meeting of the Council of Elrond, Frodo had been an unknown hobbit from a relatively unknown place called the Shire; somehow, however, seemingly by chance--but implicitly by design--he has been chosen as the one being--the one individual--in the whole of Middle-earth who may hope to bring the one Ring of Power to the subterranean fire where it was made, and casting it within its depths, destroy it, and with it, the power of the Dark Lord. But this glimmer of hope relies only in the belief that it is Frodo's appointed task to attempt such a hopeless quest, and not in any rational belief that a weak and unknown hobbit may succeed where whole armies, great warriors, and powerful wizards would have no hope.

Frodo's path in life--his *appointed* path--leads him into a direct confrontation with the impossible, and yet, it is imperative--if he wishes to fulfill his responsibility as an individual--that he attempts to *go on*, seeking to overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles of reaching the Cracks of Doom and casting the Ring of Power inside. If Frodo does not find the way to do this, as Elrond says, then no one will.

Yet, "it is a heavy burden," and a burden that must be carried by Frodo--as an individual--on his own; he cannot share it with others, for it was of his own free will that he took the burden, and furthermore, it is a burden that only he can bear because it was appointed to him. More importantly, Frodo's burden is one that places him in a position where his weakness is greatly magnified, making him vulnerable to increased suffering, mortification, and almost certain death. Frodo's innate weakness as a hobbit is enlarged as he finds himself struggling against

impossible odds: Frodo Baggins: what is he before the mighty armies of Sauron, the presence of the Captain of the Nazgûl, or the power of the one Ring? Seemingly, nothing, or at the most, "no more than a worm in the mud" (III, p. 141). And to further increase the sense of his weakness, Frodo's quest does not have the support of reason, but rather, it seems to be based on foolishness and absurdity, as when he volunteers to take the Ring:

'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way.' (I, p.355)

Here, Frodo is saying that he will take the burden of the Ring--the one Ring on which rests the destiny of the whole of Middle-earth--and yet, he does not even know where he is going! What greater madness could there be than to let this "witless halfling" (as Denethor later calls Frodo) take on the quest to destroy the Ring? Thus, not only is Frodo in a much greater position of weakness as he confronts--alone--the impossible and the forces behind it, but his weakness is also manifested in that there really is no rational hope that he will succeed; his only hope is a "fool's hope" (III, p. 118), not based on strength or wisdom, but on weakness itself, and the belief--expressed elsewhere by Tolkien-- that often the seemingly unknown and weak are the ones who turn the wheels of the world.

I. The Music of Ilúvatar and the Will for Life

Before continuing, it is important to clarify Tolkien's idea that each individual has an appointed path--a purpose--that is part of a greater design or plan, but that relies on the free will of the individual for its successful completion. This idea is illustrated in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*, which deals with the history and mythical origins of Middle-earth, and that pre-dates the events depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the *Silmarillion*, Tolkien's portrayal of the creation of the universe is presented as a result of God's creativity, together with that of the creatures of this creation:

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad....

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. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, you shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devises, *if he will*. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.'⁷ (italics added)

Thus, the Music of the Ainur is the creative musical improvisation of each of the Ainur upon the theme of Ilúvatar, showing the powers and devises attributed to each by the One, yet doing so out of their own will. However, one of the Ainur, Melkor, out of a desire to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to him, begins to "interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar" (p. 4). This results in discord, confusing the other Ainur, and

turning the original theme into "a sea of turbulent sound" (p. 4) that ends only after the intervention of Ilúvatar himself, and the introduction of new musical themes. When the Music finally ceases--after great strife and "a war of sound"--Iluvatar calls upon the Ainur and speaks to them, telling them that--indeed--"mighty are the Ainur," and that the mightiest among them is Melkor; Ilúvatar shows them a vision of what they have created through their music and song, so that Melkor--and the other Ainur--may see who Ilúvatar is: the One. He declares to Melkor that no theme may be played that has not its ultimate source in Him, and that no one can alter the music in His despite, for anyone who attempts to do so will prove to be but Iluvatar's instrument in the "devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined" (p. 5).

Ilúvatar shows the Ainur a vision of a new world, the vision of the Music they have just created; before them unfolds the World that is yet to be, and they see much of its history and splendor, finding in it those things each had devised or added in the music. Yet, they do not see all:

...for to none but himself has Ilúvatar revealed all that he has in store, and in every age there come forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do not proceed from the past. And so it was that as this vision of the world was played before them, the Ainur saw that it contained things which they had not thought. And they saw with amazement the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar, and the habitation that was prepared for them; and they perceived that they themselves had been busy with the preparation of this dwelling, and yet knew not that it had any purpose beyond its own beauty. For the children of Ilúvatar were conceived by him alone; and they came with the third theme, and were not in the theme which Ilúvatar propounded in the beginning, and none of the Ainur had part in their making.(p. 6)

Thus, the children of Ilúvatar, who are Elves and Men, are the indirect--and unexpected--result of Melkor's discord. Their nature and ultimate purpose lie

hidden from all save Ilúvatar, and--being part of the theme of Ilúvatar that brought an end to the discord caused by Melkor's desire "to interweave matters of his own imagining"--the children of Ilúvatar have a paramount role in the development and final outcome of the history of the World. Furthermore, they are free, and reflect the mind of Ilúvatar in unforseen ways, capable of creating their own music with which to adorn the theme from which they were created; for at the end of days, the choir of the Ainur and the children of Ilúvatar will join together before Ilúvatar in the making of music even greater than when the Ainur first played to the first theme of Ilúvatar.

(In this context, the music, songs and poetry of Elves and Men found throughout Tolkien's works dealing with Middle-earth can be seen or interpreted as a form of "prayer," a way through which a link with the infinite, with the divine, with God--Iluvatar, or the One--can be established, since these songs are a result of the creativity of the children of Ilúvatar, and all their music has its uttermost source in the third theme of Ilúvatar, from which they were made.)

Thus, it can be said that in the universe amid which Middle-earth is, all things have been determined by the design of Ilúvatar (in spite of the discord of Melkor), and that the paths of all individuals have consequently been apportioned since the Music has been played and has ceased. Nevertheless, the life and purpose of each individual must still be *achieved* and *willed*, very much as when the Ainur--or the Valar, the Powers of the World--first entered into Eä, "the world that is," and that their music--or so they thought--had created:

But when the Valar entered into Eä they were astounded and at a loss, for it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped, and it was dark. For the Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought in the Timeless Halls, and the Vision only a foreshowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and the Valar perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and that they must

achieve it. (p. 9) (italics added)

This is Tolkien's solution of the problem of determinism versus free will: he calls upon the freedom of the individual to creatively improvise upon the theme of Ilúvatar or God by using the gifts and talents given to each by the One; only if this is done--achieved--will the individual be able to follow the path apportioned to her through the Music of Ilúvatar. In one sense, the world is still being created, being the result of Iluvatar's creativity together with that of the creatures of his creation, but the musical "score" has already been written, before the beginning of Time. The individual is free to follow this "musical score"--to follow his apportioned path by willfully adding his own talents and gifts to the music--or to go astray, as Melkor did, driven by the vain desire to bring into being matters of his own imagining, and by doing so, to cause discord and strife to those around him. Thus, there is a "grand design" behind the events depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*; what takes place in the trilogy is not the product of mere chance, but rather, it depends on the fidelity of will of the characters portrayed--each as individuals--not to stray from their apportioned paths. The design of Iluvatar--the One--rests on the freedom of the individual to manifest her uniqueness of character, fulfilling her duty, responsibility, and purpose creatively, and thus, in this manner, *will* her life.⁸

II. The Path of the Individual

The quest of the individual in J.R.R. Tolkien's Ring trilogy is to *will* life, to walk upon the appointed pathway, non-withstanding where it might lead him, and--if necessary--to commit himself to the absurd and foolish attempt to overcome the impossible; that is the duty, responsibility and purpose of the individual in Tolkien's Middle-earth. As already noted, this quest to will one's life --particularly in the face of impossible odds--is a heavy burden, to use the words of Elrond, for it sends the individual into a journey without hope; and yet, it is a journey that is willfully taken, and as such, it cannot be taken away:

'Well, Frodo,' said "Aragorn at last." "I fear that the burden is laid upon you. You are the bearer appointed by the Council. Your own way you alone can choose. In this matter I cannot advise you. I am not Gandalf, and though I have tried to bear his part, I do not know what design or hope he had for this hour, if indeed he had any.. Most likely it seems that if he were here now the choice would still wait on you. Such is your fate. (*The Lord of the Rings*, I, p. 512)

Here, Frodo must exercise his freedom, and make a choice. The burden has been laid upon him: on the one hand he can see it is his responsibility to take the burden, and thus, to continue walking on the path that has been appointed to him by "fate"; yet, he also realizes that it is indeed a very heavy burden to accept and bear as his own. Tension develops, and he becomes uncertain and doubtful as to where he should walk; his fears grow as he contemplates what may befall him as a result of taking the burden. Still undecided as to his choice, he asks his companions for some time to reconsider the circumstances on his own, so that he may choose what to do. While he drifts in the near by woods, Boromir follows him, and sitting by his side, offers his advice to the troubled hobbit:

'You are kind,' answered Frodo. 'But I do not think that any speech will help me. For I know what I should do, but I am afraid of doing it, Boromir: afraid'....

Suddenly Boromir came and sat beside him. 'Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?' he said. 'I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?'

'I think I know already what counsel you would give, Boromir,' said Frodo. 'And it would seem like wisdom but for the warning of my heart.'

'Warning? Warning against what?' said Boromir sharply.

'Against delay. Against the way that seem easier. Against refusal to the burden that is laid upon me. Against --well, if it must be said, against trust in *the strength and truth of Men.*' (I, p.514)(italics added)

At this point, Frodo is still inwardly debating whether or not he should accept the burden that has been laid upon him: he doubts, and it is fear that causes him to consider very carefully what it is he must commit himself to do if he takes upon himself to take the Ring as his burden. First of all, he is obviously afraid of having to struggle against forces that are--particularly from his hobbit point of view--seemingly invincible. For all he knows, he may actually have to go into Mordor--on his own--into what surely would be walking towards his own death and great suffering and mortification in the process. He realizes fully the hopelessness of his quest and his own weakness: in fact, what he would be doing would be entering--Frodo Baggins, a mere hobbit from the Shire--into the stronghold of the Enemy, Sauron, and he would be taking with him the one Ring of Power that the Dark Lord so lustily desires; if he were to be captured--and the prospects for this are most likely--he would be providing the Enemy with the one weapon that would transform Sauron into a truly invincible tyrant over Middle-earth.

Frodo is perfectly aware of his hopeless dilemma *if* he takes the burden laid upon him. That is why the counsel of Boromir would seem as wisdom to Frodo if

only for the warning of his heart. For the wisdom of Boromir--who considers himself one of the true-hearted Men from the city of Minas Tirith, who "cannot be corrupted"--is based on the "strength and truth of Men"--reason--and reason calls it a folly that Frodo should take on the impossible and hopeless quest of trying to destroy the Ring; these are Boromir's words to Frodo:

'And they tell us to throw it away!' he cried. 'I do not say *destroy* it.

That might be well, if reason could show any hope of doing so. It does not. The only plan that is proposed to us is that a halfling should walk blindly into Mordor and offer the enemy every chance of recapturing it for himself. Folly!' (I, p.516)

Indeed, Boromir has a good--and very logical--point. Of course, all he really wants is the Ring for himself, for his own glory and power, but nevertheless, his argument is valid enough that one must agree that Frodo's quest is madness. Yet--it must be repeated--Frodo is perfectly aware of the situation; he is not--as Boromir claims--blind, or lacking enough sense to understand the hopelessness of his predicament once he accepts whole heartedly the burden laid upon him; at the same time, however, his heart warns him not to trust the strength and truth of Men.

What is he to do then? What is to steer him in his decision?

Unexpectedly, Boromir's lust for the Ring and its promise of power and glory provide the answer to Frodo's dilemma. The attempt by Boromir to take the Ring away from Frodo forces the hobbit to put on the Ring in order to get away from the man from Minas Tirith, who having literally fallen to the ground while trying to grasp the Ring from Frodo, is left weeping on the stony ground. Shaken with grief and terror, Frodo reaches the summit of Ammon Hen, from where he is able to view much of the surrounding world. The power of the Ring he wears enables him to perceive and sense much of what is taking place on these regions of Middle-earth, and everywhere he faces, he sees the growing power of Sauron, and the signs of war. "All the dark power of the Dark Lord was in motion (I, p.518)." Presently, the internal struggle within him intensifies, as the presence of Sauron's Eye is felt ever

closer and more powerful, and his own fears rebel to the calling of his heart: he is free to choose. Finally, aware of himself, of who he is--of Frodo, the individual--he takes the Ring off:

Frodo rose to his feet. A great weariness was on him, but his will was firm and his heart lighter. He spoke aloud to himself. 'I will do now what I must ,' he said. 'This at least is plain: the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone. Some I cannot trust, and those I can trust are too dear for me: poor old Sam, and Merry and Pippin. Strider, too: his heart yearns for Minas Tirith, and he will be needed there, now Boromir has fallen into evil. I will go alone. At once. (I, p.520-21)

Frodo's decision to accept the burden is based mainly on one point: it is *his* duty, *his* responsibility, and *his* purpose to do so: he must do as he must--to walk all the way to the end of his life's pathway--even if it seem hopeless, absurd or foolish. He must contribute and play the part that has been assigned to him--seemingly--by fate (and in the context of the *Silmarillion* , by Ilúvatar). It is *his* part; no one else can play it for him, nor take it away from him; not to accept the burden of the Ring would lead him away from his life's appointed path. He must attempt to do the impossible, and in doing so, *will* his life, even if it means death.

III. Self-denial and the Hope of the Hopeless

So far in this analysis, Frodo has been the only individual in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* who has been examined in the light of the author's belief that the seemingly unknown and weak often are the ones who turn the wheels of the world, while the eyes of the great are turned elsewhere. The character of Sam Gamgee--Frodo's faithful servant--must also be examined in view of the above statement, especially since--as it turns out--Sam ends up going into Mordor with Frodo and the Ring, and consequently, without him, Frodo would have been unable to reach the Cracks of Doom.

Like Frodo, Sam also has a burden placed upon him, although it is not as obvious nor as heroic as Frodo's.⁹ Rather, Sam's burden is simply to love his master, and to manifest this love by serving him at all costs and under all circumstances: that is his duty, his responsibility, and purpose, as such, his appointed path in life: to serve Frodo. However, unlike his master, Sam does not receive his burden in as direct and straight forward manner as the handing down of the Ring from Bilbo to Frodo; rather, it seems almost as if he finds himself accompanying Frodo because of trivial chance or circumstances, as when Sam gets caught eavesdropping by Gandalf back in the Shire, before Frodo's quest had even started. In a number of significant ways, Sam is confronting the same impossible odds that his master is struggling against; he too is led by his life's path into Mordor, to attempt to reach the Cracks of Doom. Yet, unlike Frodo--who from the very beginning of his journey has a fairly good idea what it is specifically that he must attempt to do in order to fulfill his purpose in life: to destroy the Ring--Sam has no specific idea what it is exactly he will be asked to do in order to serve his master. Nevertheless, from the beginning, Sam always has a premonition that a specific task would be assigned to him by "fortune." The following is Sam's response to Frodo's question--during the first stages of their journey--whether he now feels any need to leave the Shire

after having met the Elves, and thus, having seen already one of his dreams--and main reasons for leaving home--come true:

'Yes, sir. I don't know how to say it, but after last night I feel different. I seem to see ahead, in a kind of way. I know we are going to take a very long road, into darkness; but I know I can't turn back. It isn't to see Elves now, nor dragons, nor mountains, that I want--I don't rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you understand me. (I, p.127)

Here, Sam shows a basic willingness to carry on with whatever it is that has been apportioned for his life. However, he does not know what this "something" is that he must do before the end; all that he knows for certain is that whatever it is that lies ahead, it has to do with his being a companion and servant to Frodo. In the words of Legolas, the elf traveling with the Company:

'Few can foresee whither their road will lead them, till they come to its end.' (II, p.121)

Sam certainly cannot foresee where his road is to lead him; he does not know where he is going. Only his sense of duty, responsibility and purpose guide him: his fidelity of will. Yet perhaps he would not be so willing "to see it through" if he could foretell what his burden --to love Frodo--would ask from him "before the end", and what he would have to go through--and suffer--in order to come to his road's end.

It is interesting to note that Tolkien chose to end the first volume of the Ring trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, with Frodo's inner struggle whether or not to take the burden --laid upon him--to take the Ring, while choosing to end the second volume, *The Two Towers*, with the inner struggle of Sam Gamgee as he considers what it is exactly that he must do and "see it through" before the end. In the chapter entitled "The Choices of Master Samwise," Tolkien presents Sam's dilemma as one of choice. (And in fact, all the main characters of the trilogy encounter this dilemma--the "doom of choice," as Aragorn so aptly puts it--at one point or another

in their own paths; however, Tolkien takes special care to portray Sam's confrontation with the "doom of choice" at greater length and with more care than with any other character, including Frodo himself.)

Until this point in the trilogy, Sam's responsibility had been to follow his master wherever he went, and to help him in whatever ways he could, such as making sure that Gollum would not try anything against Frodo, or preparing a stewed rabbit for his master. Yet, presently, Sam finds himself in an entirely new position, where he is alone, no longer with a master to tell him what needs to be done (notice Tolkien's choice of words for the chapter's title: "The Choices of Master Samwise", and not "The Choices of Servant Samwise"). Suddenly, without warning, Sam finds himself before the seemingly dead body of Frodo. He is alone, with no one else near by to help him or advise him on what the best course of action may be:

"What shall I do, what shall I do?" he said. "Did I come with him all this way for nothing?" And then he remembered his own voice speaking words at the time he did not understand himself, at the beginning of their journey: *I have something to do before the end, I must see it through, sir, if you understand.*

'But what can I do? Not leave Mr. Frodo dead, unburied on top of the mountains, and go home? Or go on? Go on?' he repeated, and for a moment, doubt and fear shook him. 'Go on? Is that what I've got to do? And leave him?' (II, p.433)

Just as in Frodo's dilemma atop the summit of Ammon Hen, Sam becomes doubtful and fearful as he contemplates taking the Ring as his burden, and leaving his beloved master. Confusion overwhelms him as he tries to establish what it is *exactly* he must do, keeping a debate within his heart. He believes that his master is gone where he cannot follow him, and that nothing can bring him back: it is impossible. Taking a rational approach, he tries to convince himself that since he is the only remaining member of the original Company of Nine, that he must see that the errand shall not fail, and that therefore, he should take the Ring and the burden that

Frodo--Sam is throughly convinced--can no longer bear. However, he acknowledges--with great emphasis--that he is weak and "sure to go wrong," because that is his nature:

'Ah well, I must make up my own mind. I will make it up. But I'll be sure to go wrong: that'd be Sam Gamgee all over.' (II, p. 434)

Thus, after making a brief rational analysis of the situation--even though he does not seem to trust his own head entirely--Sam opts to take the Ring and the burden it carries.

It must be noted here that the last thing Sam wanted to do was to leave Frodo, even though he appears to Sam as being dead. But in an act of willfull *self-denial*, Sam leaves his beloved master behind in order that the errand may continue, even though it is still as hopeless, if not more, than when Frodo carried the burden of the Ring:

'Good-bye, Master, my dear!' he murmured. 'Forgive your Sam. He'll come back to this spot when the job is done--if he manages it. And then he'll not leave you again. Rest you quiet till I come; and may no foul creature come anigh you! And if the Lady could hear me and give me one wish, I would wish to come back and find you again. Good-bye!' (II, p.434)

Obviously, even though Sam's words to his seemingly dead master carry some measure of hope for his return by his side, the fact that he calls for the "Lady" (Galadriel, from the Elves' sanctuary of Lothlórien), wishing that if she could hear him, that she would grant him the wish to return to Frodo, this indicates that Sam has no real hope--in view of the circumstances--of coming back to his master's side once he has ventured into the dark valleys of Mordor. In other words, Sam is aware that he is about to embark in a struggle against impossible odds, and accepting his weakness, he sees no hope but in the "Lady"--in the magic and music of the Elves--or to put it in a different light, in a miracle.

This is perhaps the most important moment in the life of Sam Gamgee as he

struggles not to stray from his appointed path. He has renounced it all: his own life--he is willing to die--his master--he is willing to leave him behind: he has denied himself so that he may carry the burden of the Ring. Yet he is still in doubt:

'I've made up my mind,' he kept saying to himself. But he had not. Though he had done his best to think it out, what he was doing was altogether against the grain of his nature. 'Have I got it wrong?' he muttered. 'What ought I to have done?....'

'If only I could have my wish, my one wish,' he sighed, 'to go back and find him!' Then at last he turned to the road in front and took a few steps: the heaviest and the most reluctant he had ever taken. (II, p. 435)

Even though it is the last thing he wants to do, Sam denies himself and takes the "heavy steps", yet still hoping for the impossible--to go back and find Frodo--and yet hopeless that such a thing can conceivably occur.

Then, at this very moment, "chance" or "fate"--in an unexpected turn of events-- grant Sam his wish; in what can very well be described as a miracle, Sam is able to return to his master, and by doing so, to perform his responsibility as an individual--to love and serve Frodo (which in his heart he always knows is his burden)--and not to carry the burden of the Ring, which is still Frodo's personal burden. Somehow--as when his call for the Lady Galadriel when under the deadly sight of the monster Shelob had caused his unmeditated cry of "Gilthoniel A Elbereth" (II, p.430) that had brought him back to his senses, hearing far off but clearly the music of the Elves, and that somehow had given him the added courage to battle on the monster--this time too, his calling for the Lady and the delivery of his "one wish"--to go back and find Frodo--miraculously takes place.

It can be argued that this can be explained in the context of the *Silmarillion* and of the music of Ilúvatar, where the Elves and their music--symbolized in the person of Galadriel--provide a link to the mythological beginnings of Middle-earth,¹⁰ when the third theme of Iluvatar--in which came Elves and

Men-brought to an end the chaos and discord caused by Melkor's desire to increase his power and glory. Thus, Sam--by calling unto the music of the Elves--is in fact addressing and tuning himself to the creativity of Iluvatar's theme; Sam's call is a kind of prayer that somehow "brings forth things that are new and have no foretelling," and that, as such, enable Sam to bring forth his own creativity so that he does not stray from his life's path. He is hopeless but willing to go to any length--including the denial of his own personal desires--to fulfill his duty, responsibility and purpose as Sam, the individual; yet, at this critical point, he feels incapable--weak--and much too unfit for the making of the right decision as to what it is that he must do; thus, his hobbit heart--in its despair and anguish--cannot help but to turn to the music of the Elves--the "Lady"--and by implication, to Ilúvatar, the One: God.

In a letter written to his son Christopher, in April 30, 1944--while Tolkien was working on the later part of the Trilogy's second volume, *The Two Towers* -- Tolkien mentions his belief--which can be applied to the events in Sam's life described above--that even when circumstances are darkest , there is still some hope that can be found:

I sometimes feel appalled at the thought of the sum total of human misery all over the world at the present moment: the millions parted, fretting, wasting in unprofitable days--quite apart from torture, pain, death, bereavement, injustice. If anguish were visible, almost the whole of this benighted planet would be enveloped in a dense dark vapour, shrouded from the amazed vision of the heavens!...But there is still some hope that things may be better for us, even on the temporal plane, *in the mercy of God* . And though we need all our natural human courage and guts (the vast sum of human courage and endurance is stupendous, isn't it?) and all our religious faith to face the evil that may befall us (as it befalls others, if God wills) still we may pray and hope. I do.¹¹ (italics added)

And so does Sam Gamgee: he puts forth all his "courage and guts" to face the evil that has befallen him and his master--not to mention the whole of Middle-earth--but when that is not enough, when it seems all is lost and the odds are completely against him, he still hopes and prays:

At last, weary and feeling finally defeated, he sat...and bowed his head into his hands. It was quiet, horribly quiet. The torch, that was already burning low when he arrived, sputtered and went out; and he felt the darkness cover him like a tide. And then softly, to his own surprise, there at the vain end of his long journey and grief, moved by what thought in his heart he could not tell, Sam began to sing. (III, p. 226)

And thus, "somehow", whenever Sam begins to sing, or when he calls upon Galadriel, or the "Lady", the impossible becomes possible: Frodo comes back to life even when Sam was entirely certain that he was dead; or Sam finds "light and water" amid the darkness and desolation of Mordor:

Sam sprang towards it. 'If ever I see the Lady again, I will tell her!' he cried. 'Light and now water!' Then he stopped. 'Let me drink first, Mr. Frodo,' he said.

'All right, but there's room enough for two.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Sam. 'I mean: if it's poisonous, or something that will show its badness quick, well, better me than you, master, if you understand me.'

'I do. But I think we'll trust *our luck* together, Sam; or *our blessing*. Still, be careful now, if it's very cold.' (III, p. 242) (italics added)

Sam and Frodo find themselves facing impossible odds, in a foolish quest that has led them into the darkest and most desolate lands of Middle-earth, and all they can trust--under these circumstances--is their "luck" or their "blessing"; and in the context of the Tolkien letter mentioned above, the only hope that Sam and Frodo can look forward to is in the mercy of God: the One, Ilúvatar, and the blessing endowed upon the world by his music and the theme that brought an end to the

discord caused by Melkor, back in the mythological beginnings of Tolkien's universe. Of course, Sam and Frodo do not know about Ilúvatar and most of the legends within the *Silmarillion* , but they are linked to it all by their trust and faith in the music and magic of the Elves, in the Lady Galadriel (who does know about Ilúvatar and has a prominent role in legends within the *Silmarillion*) and in what they represent and mean in the lives of the hobbits. Besides, both Frodo and Sam are part of the music of Ilúvatar, and their very actions--guided by their fidelity of will to follow their apportioned paths and do as they must do--contribute to the grand design of Iluvatar's creativity.

IV. Parallels to the Nazarene

So far it has been shown that the individual in Tolkien's Middle-earth--and specifically in his trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*--has an appointed path that must be followed out of a sense of responsibility, and that must be followed *willfully* in order that it comes to be in accordance with a grand design by a supreme being: God. It is through this grand design--this intervention--that Ilúvatar ends the discord brought about by the desire of one of the higher beings of his creation to gain greater power and personal glory. Furthermore, it has been said that Tolkien presents the dilemma of the individual who wishes to follow his path--to will his life--but who encounters obstacles that seem impossible to surmount, and indeed, even to attempt to struggle against such impossible odds seems--in the eyes of reason- an absurdity and even madness. Nevertheless, the individual must *go on*, in spite of his weakness before the impossible, and--in the words of Sam--"see it through," in order to walk to the end of life's road, willing life, even if it means great suffering, mortification and death.

In this context, to the observant reader, it becomes apparent that there are definite parallels between *The Lord of the Rings* and *the Bible* --in particular, to *the New Testament* and the life of Jesus--with respect to the treatment and exposition of the individual's dilemma when facing "impossible odds." It must be emphasized that although some of these parallels are significant enough to be considered in this analysis, they are nevertheless only similarities, not to be interpreted allegorically, but rather, to be seen as being helpful to a clearer understanding of the universality and depth of meaning within the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. These parallels arise from the fact that much of *the Bible* --it can be argued--can be seen as a series of accounts about individuals who find themselves against impossible odds, in situations in which their very meaning and purpose--each as individuals--is at stake, depending on whether or not they have the

fidelity of will to continue walking to the end of the path that has been apportioned to them by a supreme being.

The prophet Moses, whose life's appointed path is to lead the nation of Israel out of the slavery in Egypt and into the promised land, or David, who at an early age is called upon to be the King of Israel, are both examples of individuals whose initial prospect of reaching their goal are--in the eyes of reason--rather poor, or even, practically speaking, non-existent. Yet (although the mechanisms for divine intervention are different in their cases as compared to that in Tolkien's world), both Moses and David manage to accomplish what logically, in their circumstances, would be impossible to achieve; and the accomplishment of their feat--to overcome the impossible--rests primarily on their willingness to *go on* to the end of life's road, and, in the words of Sam, "see it through," even if it means great suffering, mortification and death.

Again, it must be emphasized that these parallels between Tolkien's work and *the Bible* can only be extended so far since there are significant differences between the two. For instance, Moses is called directly by God to take the responsibility of delivering the nation of Israel from their suffering and slavery in Egypt. According to the account in the book of Exodus, God literally talks to Moses, telling him that He has witnessed the affliction of His people, and has heard their cries:

"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."(Exodus 3: 8-10)¹²

This is in sharp contrast to the more indirect and subtle apportionment of responsibilities for the individual in Tolkien's Middle-earth, where--for example--the closest Frodo gets to hearing the voice of Ilúvatar is through the music

of the Elves, or through the singing voice of Sam. Nevertheless, the parallel remains that Moses--as with the individual in Tolkien's Middle-earth--has an appointed path to follow--a responsibility to fulfill--that in one way or another is to lead to a confrontation with impossible odds, which in the case of Moses, is to get Israel out of Egypt. Moreover, the path of Moses's life--once it is fulfilled willfully--is to be the way and the instrument through which God delivers His people from the power of the Egyptians; in the context of what has been discussed regarding the music of Ilúvatar, Frodo too--and Sam--can be seen as being the instruments through which the One ends the discord brought about by Melkor's lust for power and glory, which in the Ring trilogy can be said to be manifested in the Dark Lord Sauron, and the Ring of Power itself. Thus, in both works of literature, one finds the presence of a supreme being who has apportioned the life paths of certain individuals through whom--if the individuals willfully follow through--the one supreme being is to rescue--and now one may use the word, *redeem* --those who would otherwise remain or become enslaved to the hostile will of a powerful lord or sovereign, who--in the context of each work--may be said to represent evil.

Here, it could be argued that this would be true for many other works of literature; and the question would have to follow, asking what it is that makes this parallel to *the Bible* so special in *The Lord of the Rings*? This can be answered by referring to the individual who--in the context of *the Bible* as a whole--can be said to be the central character of the work.

Of all the characters within the accounts in *the Bible* whose lives have parallels to Tolkien's presentation of the struggle of the "seemingly unknown and weak" against impossible odds, perhaps it is the life of Jesus of Nazareth that most closely resembles the plight and quest of Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings* . The narratives of his life in *the New Testament* provide the picture of a man who has accepted the responsibility to follow the path of his life, as an individual, to the end, and whose commitment to this endeavor brings him face to face with the

impossible: to die and resurrect so that humanity may be redeemed. Obviously, according to reason, not only is it impossible for a man to die and three days later, return to life, but it is perhaps more of an intellectual scandal that the actions of one man--irrelevant of his nature or moral character--could conceivably redeem any number of human beings throughout history from the consequence of their misdeeds and wrongdoings: death.¹³ Nevertheless, Jesus of Nazareth goes ahead and tries to do exactly that: to overcome the Impossible:

"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." And he was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." (Luke 9:22-24)

Here, one can see a number of significant parallels with Tolkien's main characters, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee. First of all, the quest of Jesus is rejected by those who can be said to represent the "strength and truth of Men" in the context of Jesus' life; that is, the elders, chief priests and scribes, who--in their minds--can only see and consider Jesus as a madman whose "quest" can only bring greater misery and oppression to their nation from the Romans, who are in political and military control of Palestine. Moreover, Jesus provides no rational explanation as to how exactly it is that--as a result of his death and resurrection--those who for the sake of Jesus lose their lives, will save them. What Jesus is saying is that through him--again, through his death and resurrection--life itself can be achieved. This is, in all honesty, absolutely absurd; only a madman would advocate such a belief and expect others to uphold it as well. That is the judgement of the strength and truth of Men: that is, reason.

Another important parallel to the quest of Frodo and Sam in the Ring trilogy is the concept of self-denial as the only way by which the individual may hope to will her life and not stray from the path that has been apportioned to her by a supreme

being. Jesus--in spite of the rejection by the elders, chief priest and scribes concerning the validity of his endeavor--must strive to overcome the impossible because only then can he truly manifest who he is as an individual. Yet, by following such a course of action, the weakness of the man, Jesus, becomes greatly magnified, making him vulnerable to increased suffering, mortification and eventual death: what is Jesus of Nazareth--the human being--before the power and glory of the Roman Empire? What is this man--nailed to a wooden cross--before the scorn and mockery of the crowd, or before the merciless and invincible might of Death? Seemingly, nothing, or at the most, "no more than a worm in the mud" of human existence. Furthermore, by taking the burden--"his cross"--Jesus is taking the risk that he will fail (and, of course, reason argues that he will), but it is his conviction and belief that if he does not stray from the path assigned to him by God, then even the impossible becomes possible:

And he was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; ye not what I will, but what Thou wilt."

(Mark 14:36)

In these words, spoken at the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion, one can see that Jesus is not a naive, thoughtless man who decides to act without some reservations about the feasibility of his proposed achievement. (This is very much reminiscent of Frodo's inner struggle at the summit of Ammon Hen, or Sam's equivalent dilemma exposed in "The Choices of Master Samwise" chapter of the Ring trilogy.) Jesus' word to his Father, "All things are possible for Thee," indicate that Jesus has considered his situation, concluding that it is indeed impossible for any human being--including himself--to die and "be raised up on the third day," much less to redeem humanity. It can even be said that there is some element of doubt--even fear--within the Nazarene at this moment. Hitherto, his life has been to follow the will of his Father, and presently, he realizes that to do so in this instance will expose him--like never before--to great torment and suffering, for he will be in a position of utter weakness, vulnerable to the forces underlying the

impossible. Therefore, once he decides to go ahead and drink from "this cup," he does not do so blindly, but instead, he recognizes fully his weakness:

"...the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying. "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done." (Matthew 26:41-42)

Jesus is fully aware of what he is getting into, and understandably, he does not want to go through the great suffering and mortification that is sure to befall him if he seeks to carry out his Father's will towards his life; yet, he denies himself and his own desires; and accepting his weakness, he does not stray from his path, willingly taking the burden placed upon his shoulders, even when this means he is headed on a straight collision course with the impossible.

V. Conclusion: The Necessity of Love

In his "First Epistle to the Corinthians", the apostle Paul provides an interesting assertion in regard to the burden--the cross--of Jesus, and the role of the weak in the turning of the "wheels of the world":

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the debater of this age? has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe...Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-29)

The above quotation--rather long, but, in the context of this discussion, very much worth addressing at length--is one of the strongest attacks in the whole of *the Bible* against what in the Ring trilogy is called as the "strength and truth of Men." Paul's words can be considered as a virtual declaration of war against the conventional wisdom of society, and of the world at large. The wisdom of the world is at odds with the "word of the cross"; and the main cause for this is due mainly to the fact that

the strength and truth of Men--reason, and the wisdom derived from it--places its trust elsewhere than on the "word of the cross," or the "foolishness" and "weakness" of God.

What Men trust more than anything else is that which to them seems certain; and in their search for certainty Men have found *reason* to be the only thing that may even come close to promising the delivery of that certainty; therefore, to the "wise man," to the "debater of this age," the only possible certainty lies in what is based on reason: the strength and truth of Men. For example, Man's capacity to reason--or so the argument would go--is the gift that has enabled societies to grow from a few nomadic families living in caves or improvised huts, to the majestic and efficient metropolises of all great civilizations, like the city of Minas Tirith, in Tolkien's Middle-earth. It is reason that has provided the common man and woman the opportunity to live with a much greater sense of security than when societies were still primitive and subject to forces that presently--under the protection of the strength and truth of Men--are no longer a threat. Are not Men in a righteous position to boast about the accomplishments of their race, since it is indeed true that most--if not all--great accomplishments of Civilization are due to the reasonable use of Men's abilities and talents? And so, this explains why it is so utterly foolish and absurd for Men--through their wisdom--to consider that the unknown and weak can somehow accomplish--completely devoid of the support of reason--feats that Men, in all their power and glory, would have no hope in achieving. And yet, or so according to the words of the apostle Paul, "God has made foolish the wisdom of the world," choosing the weak, the foolish, the base and the despised things of the world as the instruments through which what is deemed as impossible --in the eyes of Men's wisdom-- is made possible.

But here, the question must be raised: Why? What is it that makes the weak so "indominable" that nothing may stand in their way, not even the strength and truth of Men, or the forces of evil?

The "word of the cross"--the way of the weak--is the road of self-denial; but not

only is it that, it is also the road of love. For it is only through love that an individual--and specially one who is weak, and has forsaken the protection of the strength and truth of Men--can deny his own desires, and commit herself to the fulfilling of her responsibility, even if this means going against impossible odds.¹⁴ Love is the ultimate motivation of those who--in their quest to will life--have no hope; in other words, love is the only source of strength for the weak:

In that hour of trial it was the love of his master that helped most to hold him firm...(The Lord of the Rings, III, 216)

and again:

He advanced down the passage, but slowly now, each step more reluctant. Terror was beginning to grip him again...It was almost more than he could screw himself to face. He would have welcomed a fight--with not too many enemies at a time--rather than this hideous brooding uncertainty. He forced himself to think of Frodo, lying bound or in pain or dead somewhere in this dreadful place. *He went on.* (III, 219-220) (italics added)

On both these occasions, Sam's motivation to go on is driven by his love for Frodo, and nothing else. Unlike reason, his love does not calculate the outcome of his actions; rather, it throws itself into the "mercy of God", demanding nothing, and yet, giving all. Very often Sam does not even know where he is going, as when he is climbing up Mount Doom with Frodo--and the Ring--on his back, but it does not matter, because he does not need *to know* : he has his heart and his love to guide him as he walks upon the path of his life, improvising on the way; and thus, fulfilling his responsibility, while at the same time, coming in accordance with the grand design of Iluvatar's music.

Sam's duty--as one who loves--has led him to the land of Mordor, where it is dark, and despair reigns over the hearts of all creatures. Yet, it is also his purpose as an individual--to love and serve his master--that enables him to continue on his quest--in spite of its seeming infeasibility--and not despair.¹⁵ It is through love that

Sam finds the fidelity of will not to stray from his apportioned path. Only through the act of loving is he able to deny himself, to surrender all, and endure the suffering and great mortification that accompany his struggle. Moreover, it is because of love--his love for Frodo--that Sam finally becomes aware of what is the "something" he felt he had to do before the end, back in the beginning of his journey; and this realization--significantly enough--comes to him when all hope--all rational hope--has withered into nothing:

He shook his head, and as he worked things out, slowly a new dark thought grew in his mind. Never for long had hope died in his staunch heart, and always until now he had taken some thought for their return. But the bitter truth came home to him at last:...there could be no return.

'So that was the job I felt I had to do when I started,' thought Sam: 'to help Mr. Frodo to the last step and then die with him? Well, if that is the job then I must do it. But I would dearly like to see Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton and her brothers, and the Gaffer and Marigold and all....'

But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue. (III, p. 259)

For Sam, to continue in his quest--charging against the impossible--means refusing to let this "bitter truth" take over his consciousness and will, and instead of becoming enslaved to it, to break its chains through *the strength of love*, bursting free, into a manifestation of his life as an individual. Even though he has no rational hope of going back to the Shire and seeing the hobbits he knows and loves, he refuses to despair and seeks the refuge of love; and by doing so, seemingly as by a miracle, he gains new strength and vitality, and his will is hardened: he must go on,

and do what he must do.

The path of Jesus also leads him to a confrontation with the impossible, and like Sam, he sees that it is necessary for him to go on, to continue walking to the end of his apportioned path, even if takes him to certain death; and like Sam, Jesus' ultimate motivation--the source of his fidelity of will--is love. When asked by the Pharisees which is the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus said:

..."You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love you neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole of the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

What is unique about Jesus' response is his assertion that if one loves God and one's neighbor, that then "the whole of the Law and the Prophets" are being fulfilled. Indeed, if an individual wishes to fulfill the path apportioned to him by God, then--according to Jesus--all he needs to do is *love*, for the Will of God and the Law of God are one and the same. In other words, love is all that is necessary for the individual who wishes to walk to the end of her life's path; even when there might be obstacles that seem insurmountable, love will somehow--as in the case of Jesus himself--carry the individual through, giving her the necessary strength and fidelity of will to carry on, and in this manner, *will life*, even if it means encountering and suffering death. But to love means to suffer--it is often not pleasant "to the flesh"--and as such, the only way that love can come into being is by the conscious exercise of the will, self-denial, and an unconquerable belief that even in the darkest of moments, there is always a glimmer of hope in the "mercy of God."

Seemingly, one may conclude from reading the life of Jesus of Nazareth in *the Bible*, and the quest of the two hobbits, Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, that--in the context of each work--it is love, more than anything else, that enables them to evercome the impossible, to surmount the impossible odds that they--as individuals--had to face in order to will their lives, and

follow to the end their lives' pathway. Their quest being hopeless, and they being weak, they nevertheless did not despair before the sombre realities of their circumstances, nor did they yield and bow down to the assertions from the strength and truth of Men that their quest was foolish, absurd, and even madness. Again, it was love that carried them through, not pride, nor anger, nor a desire for greater power and personal glory: it was only love.

In another letter written too to his son Christopher during the time he was still working on the writing of his Ring trilogy, J.R.R. Tolkien tells his son of a letter he received from a reader who, having read *The Hobbit*, could not help but to write the author in gratitude for what the book had done for her. Meditating on how his book, "such a very small drop of water should be so intoxicating", Tolkien asks the question: "Do you think 'The Ring' will come off, and reach the thirsty?"¹⁶ From this rather intimate statement from the author of one of the most popular "fantasy" works of the century, it becomes apparent that Tolkien did not write his trilogy--and other related works--thinking about what the literary critics would have to say in regard to his art. Rather, it is possible to assume that Tolkien's ultimate motivation for writing was--yes--love. Love for the "thousands of grains of good human corn [that] must fall on barren stony ground," and be lost because there is no one to provide them with the precious liquid that will make them grow and truly live; love for the thirsty, the weak, the base, and the despised; in short, love for his fellow human being, and in the long run, love for God. Today, although there are some who consider Tolkien no more than a mere "fantasy" writer, one can say that, yes, 'The Ring' has reached the thirsty: there is hope; there is hope because, even though the world might be engulfed in an invisible shroud of dread and despair, there are individuals--seemingly unknown and weak--who will rise to the call and music of Ilúvatar, of God, of Love, struggling successfully and inexplicably against impossible odds, so that the 'wheels of the world' might be turned in the direction of the grand design of the supreme being-- God--and the world be saved and redeemed from the chaos and discord brought about by those who only seek personal power and glory.

Notes

¹Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien; A Biography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 176.

²J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), p. 149.

³*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 52.

⁴*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, p. 154.

⁵J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 3 vols. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), II, p. 253. All citations from the Ring trilogy are given in the text parenthetically.

⁶Among studies on the conflict of "good and evil" in Tolkien, see Paul H. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).

⁷J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 3; all other citations in this section are given in parentheses.

⁸Hugh T. Keenan, "The Appeal of the Lord of the Rings: A Struggle for Life", in *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Isaac Neil and Rose Zimbardo (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 64, discusses the greater importance of the conflict of "life versus death" as opposed to "good versus evil."

⁹W.H. Auden, "The Quest Hero", in *Tolkien and the Critics*, pp. 40-56, discusses the plight of the hobbit in the context of the traditional "quest" of the hero.

¹⁰Anne C. Petty, *Tolkien's Mythology*, (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), pp. 25-76, examines this aspect of Tolkien's work, and places it in perspective to the "mythic impulse" that, according to Petty, is basic to all great

literature.

¹¹*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* , p. 76.

¹²All citations from the Bible are to the New American Standard version and are given in the text parenthetically.

¹³Sören Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 259-263; also discusses the paradoxes of faith and sacrifice, in addition to the "madness" of such biblical characters as Abraham and Job, in addition to Jesus.

¹⁴Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Men, Halfling, and Hero Worship," in *Tolkien and the Critics* , pp. 109-127, discusses "love as the dominant emotion " in the Ring Trilogy, but gives it an emphasis to what the author calls "hero worship", "particularly evident in the relationship between Aragorn and the other characters and between Frodo and Sam."

¹⁵Roger Sale, "Tolkien and Frodo Baggins", in *Tolkien and the Critics* , examines Tolkien and "...the heroism about which he writes best and therefore most cares about [as being] of a distinctively modern cast--a heroism based upon the refusal to yield to despair rather than on any sense of goal or achievement, a heroism that accepts the facts of history and yet refuses to give in to the tempting despair that those facts offer," p. 251.

¹⁶*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* , p. 98.

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