

How Game of Thrones Broke My Soul and Tolkien Put it Back Together

NSC – July 2017

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From the Director of **THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION** and the Producer of **THE TERMINATOR**

THE WALKING DEAD



A NEW ORIGINAL SERIES
SUNDAY OCT 31 10/9c **amc**



Is it wrong to kill a person who has done
nothing wrong?

Imagine you perceive a person is threatening you and your family in some way, though you aren't quite sure.

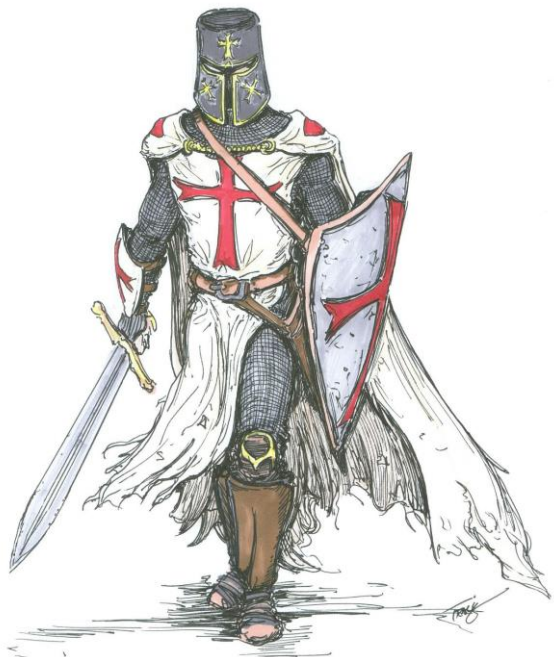
Would you kill this person?

What would you do?

Imagine the same scenario, but imagine there are no police or authorities to call AND there are no conceivable consequences.

Would you kill the person?

What would you do?



**i Think
Therefore I am.**



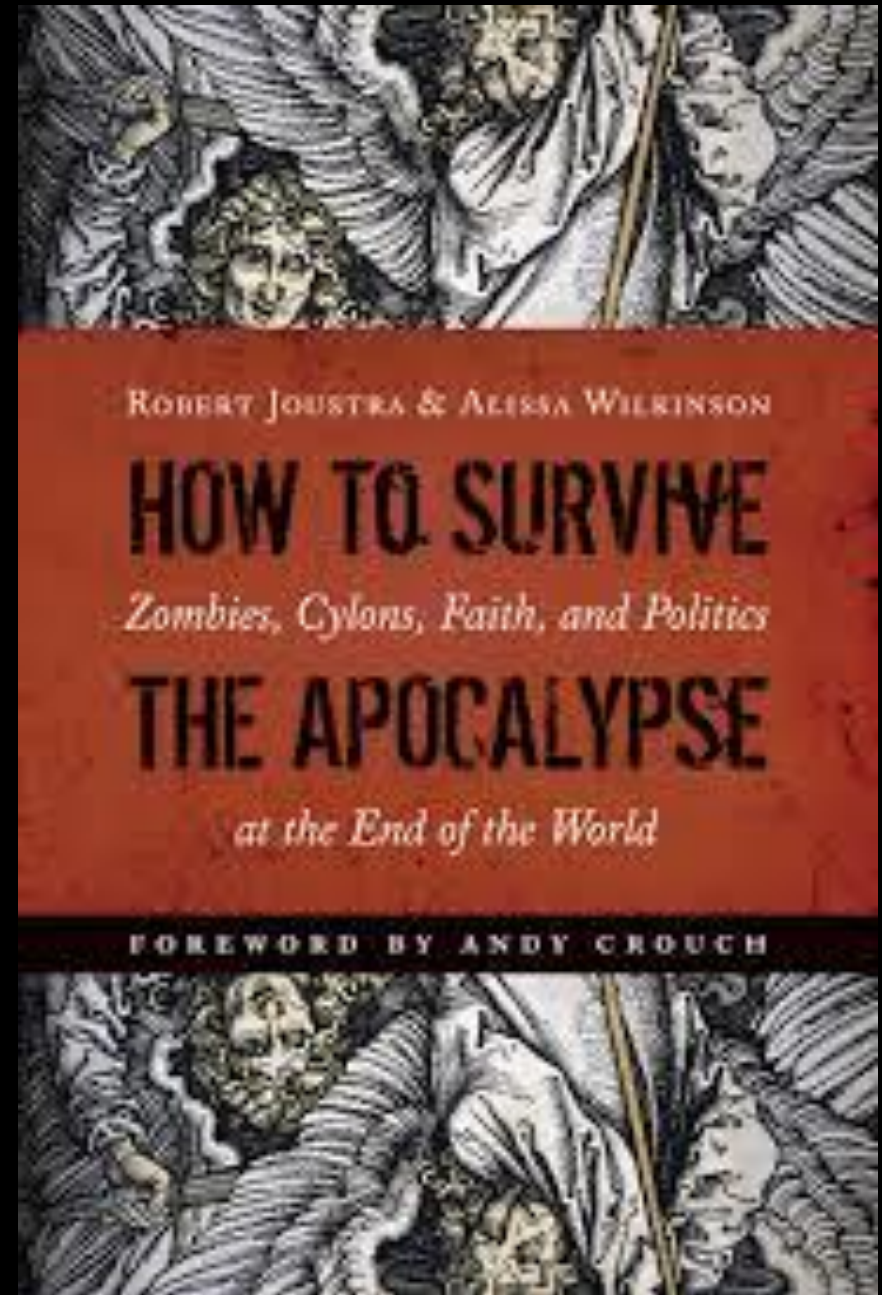
~~i~~MPOSSIBLE



Apocalyptic Literature and Modern Dystopia

- Apocalyptic stories are not new – Flood stories, Final Judgments – but these stories included hope for better future with remnant who survived
- Modern Dystopia either doesn't have that hope or that hope is tenuous

“Our forefathers conceived of Ragnarok or Armageddon as a judgment visited from on high upon mankind, a Day of Reckoning chosen and enacted by a God or gods. But today, we imagine the apocalypse differently: we’ve swapped ourselves into the position of apocalypse-enactor.



We have science, and scholarship, and technology, all of which let us understand and manipulate our environment with previously unthinkable powers: we can cure disease, beam a message around the globe in seconds, walk on the moon, see the invisible. Our destinies are in our hands, and that control is so broad, so unprecedented, that apocalypse is within our grasp. You and I have become gods.

But that has come with a price: now we can bring about the end. We are the authors of our own destruction. Since the early Cold War, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction — launch the missile, we'll launch one back — has constantly reminded us that we teeter on the edge. One diplomatic misstep or inadvertent bump of the button, and our thin veneer of civilization will crack. Our godlike powers are as much a product of our power to destroy as to create.

TV shows have shifted from a dominantly utopian imagination to one marked by the apocalyptic — and the dystopian. We once had the Cold War utopianism of Captain Kirk; now we have J. J. Abrams' Star Trek into Darkness, with its none-too-metaphorical annihilation of logic — an inversion of the Trek universe — through the destruction of the planet Vulcan. We've gone from the idealist psycho-history of Isaac Asimov to the fatalist siren call of the Cylons in Battlestar Galactica. We went from the sacrificial valor of Hobbits to the purging of innocence in Westeros”

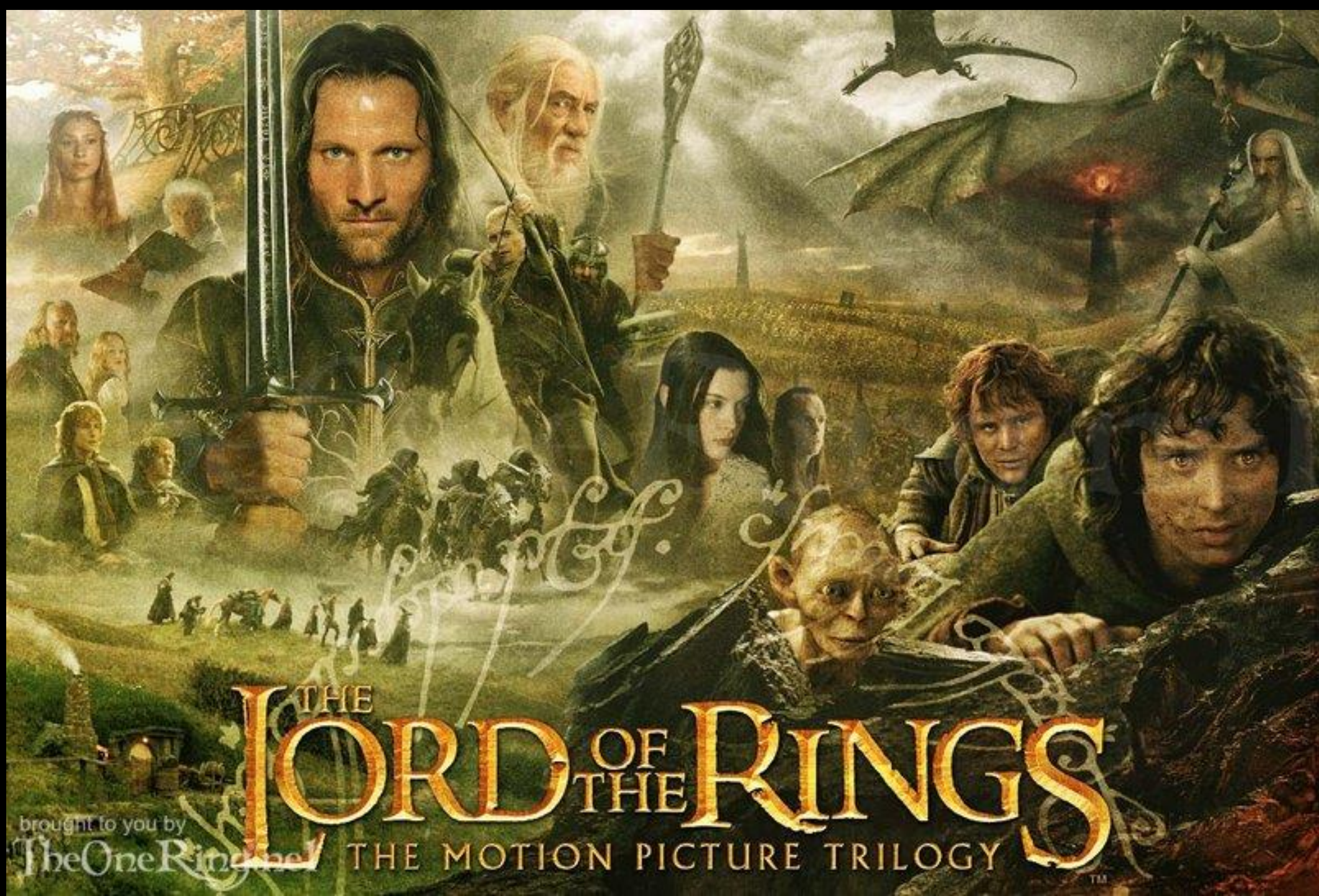
Joustra, Robert; Wilkinson, Alissa. How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World (p. 3). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

A dramatic scene from the TV series Game of Thrones. Stannis Baratheon, played by Ian McEwan, is seated on the Iron Throne. He has a stern, determined expression and is looking slightly to the right. He is wearing dark, heavy armor with a prominent pauldron on his right shoulder. His hands are clasped in his lap, holding a sword hilt. The Iron Throne is a massive, imposing structure made of dark, jagged metal blades and spikes, some of which have skulls or other symbols attached. The background is dark and moody, with a subtle gradient. The overall tone is somber and powerful.

GAME OF THRONES

“You win or you die” – Cersei Lannister

"Oh, my sweet summer child," Old Nan said quietly, "what do you know of fear? Fear is for the winter, my little lord, when the snows fall a hundred feet deep and the ice wind comes howling out of the north. Fear is for the long night, when the sun hides its face for years at a time, and little children are born and live and die all in darkness while the direwolves grow gaunt and...hungry, and the white walkers move through the woods" - Game of Thrones (the book!)



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The One Ring

THE MOTION PICTURE TRILOGY

TM

"Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought"

Gandalf

“It might all have gone very differently indeed. The main attack was diverted southwards, it is true; and yet even so with his far stretched right hand Sauron could have done terrible harm in the North, while he defended Gondor, if King Brand and Kain Dain had not stood in his path. When you think of the great Battle of the Pelennor, do not forget the Battle of Dale. Think of what might have been. Dragon-fire and savage swords in Eriador! There might be no Queen in Gondor. We might now only hope to return from the victory here to ruin and ash. But that has been averted – because I met Thorin Oakenshield one evening on the edge of spring not far from Bree. A chance-meeting, as we say, in Middle Earth”

Gandalf (The Quest for Erebor, Unfinished Tales)

“It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the “turn” comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality.”

JRR Tolkien – On Fairy Stories

What Difference Does it Make?



“We can discuss the popular arts as cultural representations or texts that give substance to cultural values and perspectives. As such, they can be 'read', interpreted, and evaluated as maps of reality, of humanly constructed representations of the world. By considering the popular arts in this way, we approach them as a dramatic conversation that we can take part in as producers, critics, and audience members. So it is that the creation and evaluation of popular art is one way we turn faith into a vision both of and for life”

Andy Crouch, *Culturemaking*, 56-57

Morality in Dystopia: How Do We Live When Worlds Fall Apart?

“If I make meaning based on what I choose is important, and you make meaning based on whatever is important to you, then what happens when our choices conflict? Who has to budge? Who gets to say which meaning wins? Well: it’s the guy with the biggest muscles. Which is to say that in the game of thrones, you win, or you die”

Joustra and Wilkinson

“to expand or counter Marx, it’s not just religion that is an opiate for the masses, a will to power — it is all social and political convention, including wealth, position, and probably celebrity. Everything is merely an end toward power, in the grand tradition of Frank Underwood. Marx, in other words, wasn’t quite up to the harshness of social reality — it took Nietzsche to finish the job. But they align as realpolitik, which suspends the integrity of religious, political, or financial institutions as mere “cards in the game” of power”

Joustra and Wilkinson

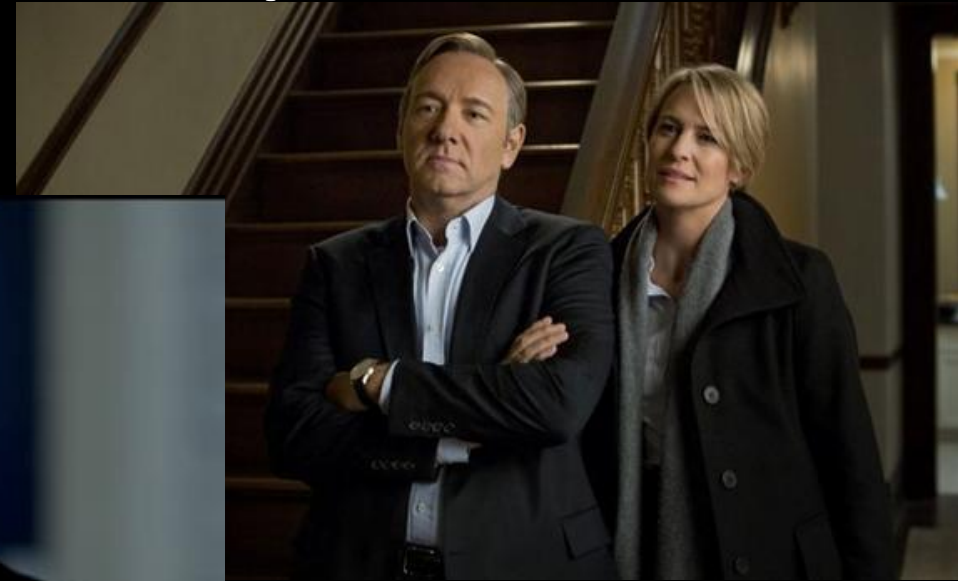
"Zombies are important as a reflection of ourselves...The ethical decisions that the survivors have to make under duress and the actions that follow those choices are very unlike anything they would have done in their normal state of life."

The Walking Dead, "allows the audience to work through some of those difficult, threatening ethical dilemmas, or to think about their own capacity for survival. What character would I be like? What would I be willing to do in order to survive?"

- Why Zombie Fascination is Very Much Alive
- <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/february/why-zombie-fascination-022013.html>

How Do We Live?

Question for Atheists and Skeptics: Why cling to traditional morality? Why NOT do everything you can for power?



How Do We Live?

- **Question for Christians: What would you do with Power? Do you reckon with your own sinfulness?**

“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

How Do We Live – Telling a Better Story

“I can only answer the question “What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”

Alasdair MacIntyre

“The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essences of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels – peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete *eucatastrophe*...The Birth of Christ is the *eucatastrophe* of Man’s history. The resurrection is the *Eucatastrophe* of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality.’ There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits”

JRR Tolkien, On Fairy Stories

The Story

Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration

But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself –

Hebrews 9:26

Jesus Completes the Bible Story

The Story

Early Christians – Jesus also is the Truth that Greek Philosophy Points to

“Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration...For this was a schoolmaster to bring ‘the Hellenic mind,’ as the law, the Hebrews ‘to Christ.’ Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ”

Clement of Alexandria, The Stromata (200s)

The Story

Jesus is the Truth ALL Stories Point To

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man”

Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces

“Spring is, of course, not really less beautiful because we have seen or heard of other like events...Each leaf, of oak and ash and thorn, is a unique embodiment of the pattern...We do not, or need not, despair of painting because all lines must be either straight or curved”

JRR Tolkien

Isn't the story of Jesus just another myth?





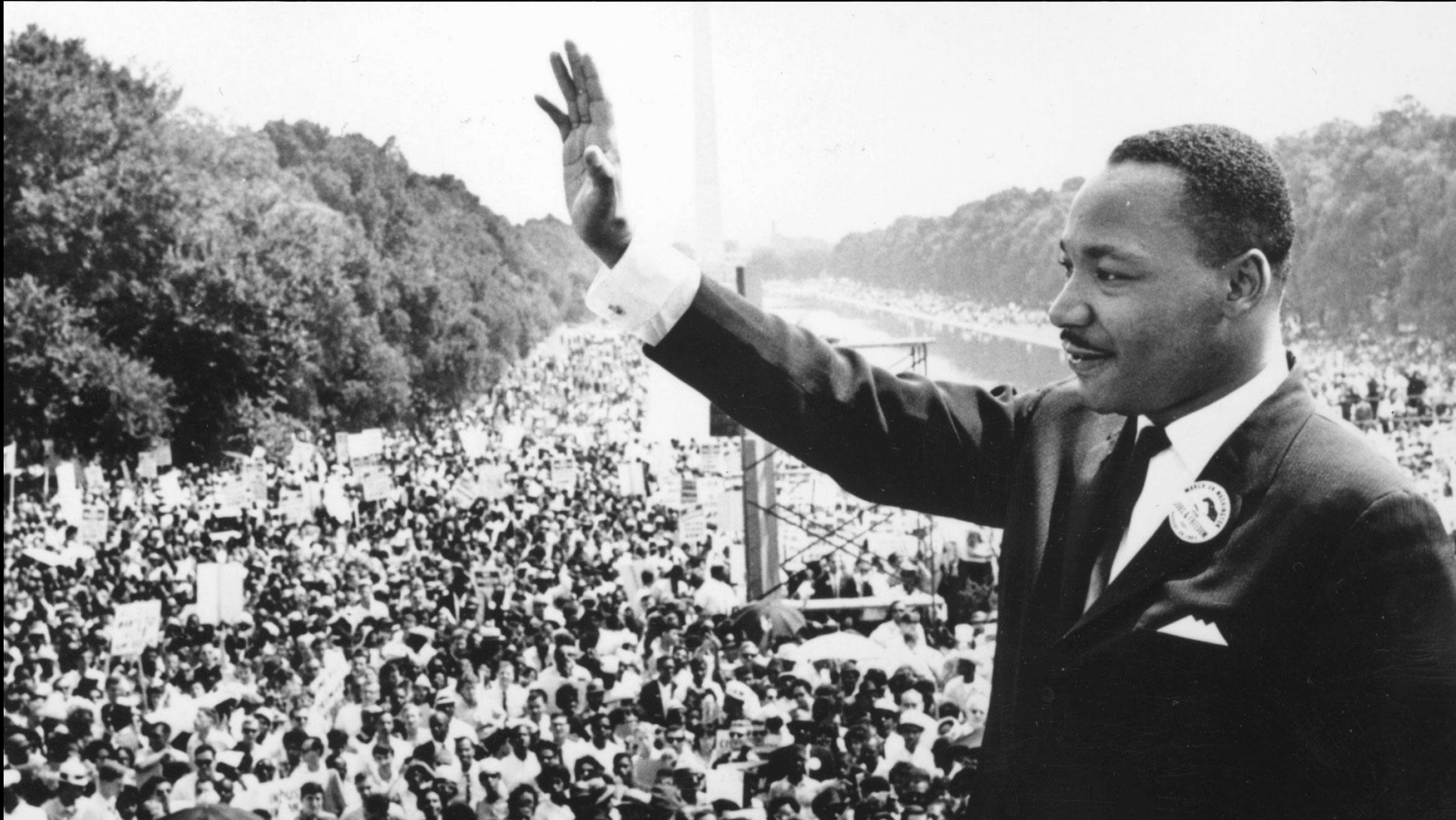
"The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact...The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. The story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*"

CS Lewis

Conclusion – Tell Them The (Compelling, Hopeful, True, Inspiring, Real) Story



“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”



“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Conclusion – Which Story Is Real? How Should We Live?

If Game of Thrones and other Dystopian Stories best reflect the real world, then get busy winning and doing all you can to get ahead!

But if The Gospel of Jesus best reflects the real world, then an other-centered life as Jesus' disciple is truly the best way to live.