

Frodo: An Unlikely Hero

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By John VanSloten

CLIP #1 - Where Bilbo describes hobbits (extended DVD version) 8:50ff

Ah Hobbits... Loveable in a way but certainly not all that impressive. Not the kind of creature that you think could make much of a difference in the big scheme of things. Rather more likely to live their lives in an innocuous, behind the scenes kind of way. In the story they're described as not "being ones for adventure, they don't expect it or want it." Frodo himself affirms this when he says to Gandalf, "Before you came along we Baggins' were very well thought of, never had any adventures or did anything unexpected" Given this kind of description one has to wonder why a Hobbit would play such a starring role in the story of the Lord of the Rings. Why pick someone so weak and so small... **PAUSE...** and in many ways so powerless? And yet, as the intro to the film says, "For the time will soon come when Hobbits will shape the fortunes of all..."

You look at the Hobbits, Frodo, Samwise, Merry and Pippin and part of you thinks, "Shape the fortunes of all... that's absolutely ridiculous!" And yet part of you connects with them in some sort of endearing kind of way. First off, I found myself really wanting them to succeed... I always root for the underdog, don't you? I also found myself relating in terms of their homebodyness. You know that feeling that you'd rather stay in a safe and warm place like the shire, where things are comfortable, predictable and known. Why risk too much when things are going well as it is? And in other ways I found myself relating to their smallness and weakness. There are times in life when I feel like a halfling; weak, a little short on gifts and abilities and that I don't really have what it takes. Maybe that's why we often root for underdogs... We're cheering for the underdog in us. **PAUSE...** Regardless of the reasons, you do end up cheering for these little beings very early on in the film.

And what really amazes me is that throughout the course of the film I found my view of these Hobbits changing, especially my view of Frodo and Sam. There's really quite a powerful paradigm shift that occurs. While we might relate to hobbits in all kinds of ways, early on we're not all that sure their the right men for the job, and yet by the end of the film, your convinced that there is no other choice. Even as Frodo and Sam go off on their own without the rest of the fellowship, you've got this sense that

they'll be able to do it. They'll be able to complete the journey successfully and take the evil ring to Mordor and see it destroyed!

Throughout the course of the film we end up discovering that there's a lot more to these little Hobbits than meets the eye. Like the good wizard Gandalf noted, "You can learn all about their ways in a month, yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you..." So what is it about these little Hobbits, more particularly, what is it about Frodo; the unlikely hero, that causes this paradigm shift to happen in our view of him, what is it that makes him the seemingly perfect candidate for the job?

Well let's follow the story and see if we can discover the answer to that question. Let's begin with the scene where Frodo is first faced with the fearful call to be the 'Ring Bearer'... [SET UP - Gandalf told Frodo about the ring... and the terrible evil that now seeks it... And how he is responsible for getting it out of the shire... see if you can see what it is in Frodo makes him our 'Ring Bearer']... **CLIP #2 - +/- 33:05 - 36:16**
Scene begins with "Take it Gandalf take it" (immediately after the beheading scene)... Freeze video and audio on Frodo's face(as he's packing the bread) after Gandalf says, "I don't have any answers" [HOLD OUT A RING]... So what does it that makes Frodo the right man for the job? **PAUSE...** In the simplest terms... its his willingness to take up the task. When faced with a very difficult and unknown duty he closes his hand over the ring and says, **"What must I do?"** The first step any ring bearer is to take the ring! And Frodo does. Not we're not sure what his motivation for doing this is as this early time in the story. At first I thought he just had a good heart; a sense of duty and conviction that someone had to save the shire. And I figured that courage also played a significant part in his choice. Sure he hesitated at first, but he eventually did the right thing. Courage is not the absence of fear, it's the willingness to go through it! Courage and a sense of duty... surely Frodo possessed these. And as I thought some more I wondered if there also wasn't a bit of a faith component at work. It might look a lot like naivete in Frodo, but in a 'David and Goliath' kind of way, Frodo went into this thing on trust.... He trusted his friend and mentor Gandalf. He needed faith to do that. The last thing one might cull from this clip is a sense that Frodo, even at this early introduction to the ring, knew, in some mysterious way, that for this time, and this place, and this ring bearing calling, he was the man. Gandalf could not do it so he must!

Small people who change the world often have this inner compunction... a knowledge that the specific calling they face is only theirs... That they need to pick up the burden...

pick up the ring and run with it.

So what motivated Frodo? Duty? Fear? Courage? Faith? A sense of Destiny? Its probably a combination of all these things.

And so Frodo begins his perilous journey... he goes to the Inn of the Prancing Pony and discovers his calling is not yet done, he must take the ring even further. (Funny how callings never get fully revealed in their beginnings... They always seem to play out on a 'need to know' basis)... Frodo now discovers that he must take the ring to the Elven city of Rivendell. And at Rivendell he comes to what he thinks is the end of his journey. At a special council meeting, a meeting of representatives from several the different races of middle earth, Frodo is able to let go of the ring, to release it from his hand and place it in the hands of the council.

Led by the Elven King, Lord Elrond, this scene plays out... **CLIP # 3 - +/- 1:30:13 - 1:32:54 Scene begins with 'Elf king' Elron saying "You have only one choice... the ring must be destroyed..." And ends " where Frodo says, "I will take the ring to Mordor" Freeze video immediately on Frodo at this point, and allow music to continue for 4-5 seconds and then fade it out...** Well Frodo was not able to let go of the burden of the ring for long was he... As he sat there during that council meeting you could imagine the thoughts that were going through his head. To first of all be reminded the terrible, destructive, enmity producing evil power that the ring possessed. The imagery of the film makes the point quite masterfully when we see all the races fighting in the reflection of the ring, surrounded by burning flames of anger.

There is something that happens in 'ring bearers' when they see the reason for their calling with fresh eyes. And this huge fight between what are supposed to be allies, is only the tip of the iceberg when he considers the terrible evil this ring might one day unleash. In witnessing the evil ring's power here as the cause of discord, he is reminded of why he needs to finish his calling. This evil cannot live on... it must be destroyed.... he must continue the journey.

PAUSE... And again, it must be him, he needs to bear the ring! Here you have this council filled with all these great warriors... men with fighting skills, experience in leadership, great wisdom and stature, the sons of kings... and their the one's succumbing to evil's enmity causing influence, while Frodo seems to be above it all... For some reason he's not lured into the fray. And in some mysterious way, for that reason, we know that he's the right man for the job.

I love the part of that scene where Gandalf's face washes over with relief after

Frodo says, **“I will take the ring to Mordor”** CLIP #4 - STILL Even as Gandalf let's out his gasp, so to do we the viewer. For some reason we know, just a little bit more than we knew at the beginning of the film, that Frodo is the only one who can do this.

But again, why is that? Here you have all kinds of warrior men with armies at their disposal... doesn't it make sense to operate from strength when faced with this kind of evil power? Should we not choose a soldier over a halfling? Go with strength instead of weakness? And yet the way of weakness seems mysteriously right. The way of weakness is right! But is this not madness?.... **PAUSE>>** READ QUOTE WITH SLIDES

“It is not madness: it is deeply sane. This is the secret that [the evil Dark Lord] Sauron doesn't understand. For him strength is always strength. This is why the idea of destroying the ring never occurs to him. Gandalf explains, “[Sauron] is in great fear, not knowing what mighty one may suddenly appear, wielding the Ring, and assailing him with war, seeking to cast him down and take his place. That we should wish to cast him down and have *no one* in his place is not a thought that occurs to his mind. That we should try to destroy the Ring itself has not yet entered into his darkest dream. In which no doubt you will see our good fortune and our hope.” (518)

The poet W.H. Auden said in reference to this passage:

“[Evil] has every advantage but one – it is inferior in imagination. Good can imagine the possibility of becoming evil – hence the refusal of Gandalf and Aragorn to use the Ring – but evil, defiantly chosen, can no longer imagine anything but itself. (7)” From John Bowen, *The Spiritual Worldview of the Lord of the Rings*

Hear what Gandalf and Auden are saying? The only think that a power mongering evil entity can ever imagine is that others would act exactly like them. The thought of a good being not wanting the power that he so desperately craves doesn't even occur to Sauron. He can't imagine anyone doing that. So coming from the angle of weakness might be a strength in this situation. Frodo's smallness may allow him in a special way to fly beneath the radar of evil.

Sauron's evil co-hort Saruman once says in the film, “Did you really think a Hobbit could contend with the will of Sauron, there are none who can” He's right if he's assuming the hobbit will try to match Sauron in a power play... But if he comes at him in another way... maybe Sauron can be caught off guard; unawares.

While men and elves and dwarves seem unable in all of their strength to bear the ring to accomplish this act, Frodo, because of who he is, is perfect for the job. (MAKE

SURE YOU ALLUDE TO THIS TRAIT later in message AS THE NB thing for knowing God for us) Why? Because only was his body small, so too was his ego. Think about his character... throughout the film its never really been about him. He took the call for others, he continued the call for others, and because of his appropriate smallness here (< point to heart), he had the special ability to carry the 'all too tempting' ring. Just before the scene we just saw Lord Elrond said of Frodo, "To have come so far still bearing the ring he (Frodo) has shown great resilience to its power" The ring was what on commentator called a 'psychic amplifier'... To the extent that there was evil in one's soul, the ring pulled it out. Frodo's resilience, was rooted in his simplicity of heart, his meekness, his humility. Frodo didn't think too much of himself... Neither did the any of the others. He had no beauty or majesty to attract anyone to him.... nothing in his appearance that we should desire him... And this made him right for bearing the ring.

And he knew it. Even though Hobbits were traditionally "despised and rejected by the race of men..." He knew this was his job. Even though he was so 'oppressed and afflicted" by this burden that he must bear.... He was willing to take up the call! And Frodo did suffer didn't he? You saw it in that last clip and you see it throughout the film. Getting big thing done can be burdensome like that sometimes.

Anyway, the journey continues... Summarize the next parts of the story here... Focus on the big tasks faced... the huge risks/obstacles.... Great fears and yet Frodo continues... Then Frodo ends up in Lothlorian... Meets Galadriel.... Place of rest... and also a place where Frodo has to once again reaffirm and take up his calling as a ring bearer.

In this next short scene Galadrial has just shown the Hobbit a glimpse of the possible future. What Frodo saw was truly horrible. It was enough to make him run in fear, and yet he could not... Why?... **CLIP #5 - +/-2:24:00 - 2:24:32 Start with Galadriel saying, "This task was appointed to you..." and freeze video on Frodo's face after Galadriel says, "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." Audio can proceed for 3 seconds and then fade out** Why could he not run... because he was appointed to this task! It was his, and his only to live out. There is an urgency that comes with this reality. There is also a very pointed resignation that grips the heart. As Galadrial speaks to Frodo, you can feel the weight of the whole of middle earth being put on him. This burden was his and his only. "If only this cup could be taken away from him..."

And so Frodo continues on his journey of a lifetime... He encounters yet more

trial and difficulty... But that does not stop him... he continues.. and the film ends with him standing on a precipice with his hobbit friend Sam... Peering out into the hills of Mordor... with so much peril, so much journey still ahead.

Video Clips (all times from start of VHS)

Frodo: The Unlikely Hero

- 1. 8:33 - 9:53 - Start with fade from Black... Freeze 2 seconds after “Its wonderful to see you Gandalf”** << this clip is a message opener... to get the story started. It can be followed up with a description of who Hobbits are. Hobbits are not ones for adventure, that is, they don't expect or want it. They have no desire for a 'bigger experience' of life, outside of the Shire. Hobbits are small, relatively weak (physically and intellectually), and, in a sense powerless.
- 2. 34:03 - 36:26 Start with closeup on ring “The ring yearns above all else to return to the hands of its master” To freeze after Gandalf says “Trust me Frodo, he'll know what to do...”** << This is Frodo's initial call into ring bearing.
- 3. 1:30:13 - 1:31:11(1:32:54) “You have only one choice... the ring must be destroyed...” to “One of you must do this...” (ENDING ONE) or to 1:32:54 where Frodo says, “I will take the ring to Mordor” (ENDING TWO)** This clip speaks of facing great evil and fear in continuing in the call. Frodo thought his job was done once he arrives in Rivendell, but the call goes on... deeper... harder... and even more dangerous! After this scene a fellowship forms... Teaching us that the call can be lived out with others, in community. For now, we're not alone!
- 4. 1:50:40 - 1:52:47 Frodo sees something in the caves of “Morya” and then says to Gandalf, “There's something down there!” to were Galdalf says, “And that is an encouraging thought” (freeze on Frodo's face)** << (intro this scene by introducing Golum)... In my estimation this scene is the crux of the film. It identifies, implicitly that there is a bigger force than evil at work. (A Caller?) When Gandalf says, *“Many that live deserve death and some that die deserve life, can you give it to them Frodo?”* is he alluding to another Force that can? This question begets that answer. Next Frodo says, *“I wish the ring had never come to me, I wish that none of this had happened...”* And Gandalf responds, *“So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to*

us.” (Again the statement begets a ‘time Giver’) *“There are other forces at work in this world Frodo besides the will of evil... Bilbo was meant to find the ring.. in which case, you also, were meant to have it... and that is an encouraging thought.”*

5. 2:10:58 - 2:12:20 This scene artistically depicts mourning the loss of Gandalf
Start when they exit the caves and freeze after the tear rolls down Frodo’s face. << this scene occurs after Gandalf falls into a pit and dies (?) It could be used to address grief and the call... Sorrow and moving on.

6. 2:24:00 - 2:24:32 Start with Galadriel saying, **“This task was appointed to you...”** and freeze after, **“Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.”** <<< this short scene addresses fear and calling.

7. 2:45:39 - 2:47:04 Starts with Frodo standing at the beach... holding the ring in an ‘open hand’ and ends with him getting into the boat. Cut before ‘Sam scene’ << a reminder of an earlier scene. Might be good as a closer... or at end of service as a form of benediction... ‘go out’ kind of message. Interesting how Frodo holds his calling with an ‘open hand’ It’s like its his to carry and yet its not his... It belongs to someone else!

The Big Story

1. 1:38 - 3:35 Start at black screen... and freeze after **“One ring to rule them all”** << this is a good intro scene (pre-message). It introduces the ring and its inception/purpose. Its also speaks of a ‘time lost’... where people knew of the ring’s power (“History became legend and legend became myth”)... But now they are ignorant. Early on in the film we learn that evil is mounting an assault again... (In many ways the setting depicted here relates to our day and age! Evil is rising... and we don’t know its name.)

2. 42:58 - 44:24 Start with Sauroon saying, **“Against the power of Mordor there can be no victory”** freeze at top of tower after **“You have elected the way of pain”** << a classic good vs evil clip... with Gandalf the Good fighting Sauroon the evil one.

In this clip we see the power of evil to deceive and corrupt minds, to destroy relationships (they used to be friends), to lead to violence, murder and death. Evil in the film is also shown in the destruction of nature (ripping out trees).

3. 1:06:14 - 1:07:21 Start with Gandalf on top of tower and moth approaching... freeze after moth flies away. << this clip can fit in with a 'providence/sovereignty' tack.... later and eagle appears to save Gandalf .

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