

“A Portal to A Parallel Universe”

Philippians 2:1-11

Series: At the Movies Week 2. The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

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To Lucy Barfield

My dear Lucy,

I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it. I shall probably be too deaf to hear, and too old to understand a word you say, but I shall still be

Your affectionate Godfather,

C. S. Lewis

So begins a little story which has sold over 120 million copies in over 47 languages. In 1950 Clive Staples Lewis published *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, a tale of four children who discover the portal to a mysterious parallel universe named Narnia through a magic wardrobe. By then, Lewis, an atheist who became a Christian, was already famous for writing numerous intellectual works explaining and defending the Christian faith to an increasingly skeptical and doubting English audience. So why would this Oxford professor of Medieval Literature, this brilliant scholar, this man who never had a child of his own turn his attention to telling a fairy tale? It became so extraordinarily popular that in 1954 Lewis was approached about making *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* into a film. He declined saying he was afraid it would be turned into a Disney movie. In December 2005 *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* movie was released...by Disney. Sorry Clive.

Between 1950 and 1956, Lewis released seven books in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He said they were his way of “smuggling in theology.” Through stories which enchant and enthrall all ages, Lewis tells the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus. Perhaps you know that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were close friends. Both were professors of Medieval Literature at Oxford, both heard and critiqued each other’s writing and both were committed Christians. In fact, Tolkien is one of the friends who helped Lewis convert from atheism to Christianity. The genre of fantasy, so popular today, can be traced back to these two friends and their writing circle. Both Tolkien and Lewis used their writing to express Christian themes and messages. One more fact – C.S. Lewis died on November 22, 1963 the same day as the assassination of President Kennedy.

To help us see Jesus in our world, Lewis created a parallel universe named Narnia. Magic rules in this fantasy realm. Animals talk, mythical creatures – such as fauns, dwarves and giants – are real, and time moves faster. There are several portals between our world and Narnia – one of which is an elaborately carved Wardrobe in the

spare room of Professor Kirke's mansion. Four siblings – Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie – are sent to this country home to escape the Nazi bombing of London. Yet when the children pass through the Wardrobe into Narnia they immediately enter another world at war. Narnia is under the spell of an evil White Witch named Jadis.

A prophecy, however, states when two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve appear, her hold on Narnia will be broken, all creatures will be free, and Aslan will return. 'Who is Aslan?' the children ask Mr. and Mrs. Beaver.

"Is-is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion-*the* Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King."¹

A lion is strong, majestic, powerful. But a lion is also wild. It's not safe to face one.

While Jesus is gentle and gracious, Lewis spotlights another side of Him. Like a lion, Jesus is also courageous and tenacious, unconquerable and uncompromising. Jesus is good but He is not safe. He has no problem correcting His disciples, confronting the politicians and priests, casting out demons, clearing out the money changer and commanding storms to shut up. He is powerful. He is the greatest good this world has ever seen but He is definitely not safe. This full-blooded human is also fully God.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. Colossians 1:15-17,19

Let the wonder of those words grab you. The power which created the cosmos, keeps the planets in their orbits and holds every atom together – that power lived in a Jewish construction worker from Galilee. That's strength. When you ask Him to be your Lord and Savior that power becomes available to you. There is no reason to struggle through life on your own power. There is no reason to feel dejected and defeated. Jesus, the Lion of Judah, wants to fill you with His supernatural **Strength**.

Unless I miss my guess, many of you are facing a challenge beyond your strength.

¹ C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Collier Books, New York, c. 1979, p. 75-76.

- You're working a ridiculous number of hours each week. You don't get to see your family and you don't see any end in sight.
- You're out of a job and it's impossible to find a position. All your contacts lead to a disconnection.
- You're a single parent, raising children, trying to hold down a job and it's getting harder not easier.
- Your marriage alternates between heated arguments and cool indifference and you wonder if there is any hope.
- Your bills always add up to more than your paycheck.
- You want to have a child and for some reason it's just not happening.
- You're raising children and you're worried how they will turn out.
- Your parent is sick, your child is sick, you're sick and you're not sure what's next.

It seems you have two choices. Keep fighting. Pour all your strength into it. Try to solve the problems on your own. Or give in, give up and run away.

Jesus provides a third way to deal with problems beyond our strength: surrender to God and trust in His power. He didn't just preach this way. He lived it. Paul writes,

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Philippians 2:5-7

Remember, all the power and strength of God was in Jesus' hands. Most of us would love to have that power to make things go our way, to solve all our problems as we want. Yet absolute power wielded by selfishness is absolutely destructive. Jesus did the opposite. He let go of the glory he had with the Father and made himself nothing. He surrendered to His Father's will and passed through the portal to our parallel universe. He entered enemy territory as a helpless human baby. The Heavenly Host which sang at His birth could have saved Him from death. But if they did, we wouldn't be saved from death.

If you surrender to Him, He will strengthen you. If you admit you are weak, that you can't do it on your own, He will come in and lead you through it. But you must give up trying to control the situation, you must give up trying to make God and people act or think your way, you must surrender the outcome and trust in Him. The Apostle Paul had to surrender and admit he was weak many times. When he did, Jesus said to him,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

To receive that strength, you need to daily tap into it through prayer and Scripture, through a weekly Growth Group, through putting it into practice. Only when we admit we are weak can we then be strong in Him. What happens when you rely on Him?

Jesus offers **Significance**. Many ask, “What is the meaning of my life?” “What is my purpose?” With little warning, your life can turn cold, fruitless, barren and empty. Maybe you feel that way right now. When the four Pevensie children stumble through the Wardrobe into Narnia they discovered a frigid world. Under the tyrannical power of the White Witch, Narnia has been imprisoned in snow for the last hundred years. It is always winter and never Christmas. Imagine a century of darkness, snow, wind, and ice without even the joy of Christmas to bring its glow. This is C.S. Lewis’ way of describing a life without God. But when Aslan returns, he breaks the Witch’s hold on Narnia. The first sign is the return of Father Christmas in his sleigh. The snow thaws, spring buds. When Jesus enters your life the darkness scatters, the cold thaws, the emptiness is filled. You unwrap the gift of joy and see the blossoming of hope.

Perhaps right now you are feeling out in the cold. You are frozen in the same drudgery and routine. Where’s the joy, the hope, the purpose? Why do people give in to temptation? Because life seems boring, dull or frustrating. Temptation offers false excitements, thrills and meaning.

What’s a healthy way to find meaning and significance? Follow the Lion – Jesus Christ. So many have bought into the myth that following Jesus is boring and routine, dull and drudgery. Nothing could be further from the truth. He will send you on adventurous missions to make an eternal difference. That is significance. If your life lacks significance you are playing it too safe. Take a step and start following Jesus the Lion. Step out of your comfort zone and make an eternal difference.

This Fall invite friends to join us for Kickoff on September 7 and discover how they can join the team to help God’s dream for this world come true. Sign your kids up for Adventure Club so they can make friends, study God’s Word, sing praises in worship and discover the greatest adventure of all: following Jesus. This Fall we’ll learn how Love Comes to Town. See how love can change our lives and communities by joining a Growth Group. Join us on November 2 for the Church Has Left the Building. We’ll make an eternal difference by visiting nursing homes and soup kitchens, serving the homeless and hungry, the addicted, lost and lonely. Now is the time to follow Jesus the Lion. Now is the time to say, “Yes, I want my life to have meaning and significance.”

Finally, Jesus offers **Salvation**. Toward the end of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe it seems that Aslan and the four children have broken the hold of the evil Witch over Narnia. But then the Witch reminds Aslan of the Deep Magic from the dawn of time. Anyone who is a traitor belongs to the Witch. Earlier in the story Edmund, driven by envy, ego and a weakness for Turkish Delight candy, betrays them all to the Witch. According to the Deep Magic of Narnia, a betrayer must die. Even Aslan is bound to obey this law or Narnia itself will fall apart. To save Edmund, Aslan makes a courageous offer – he trades his life for Edmund’s. In a terrifying scene, the demons

dance around a Stone Table as the once powerful Lion surrenders to his fate. Tied and shorn of his magnificent mane, Aslan lies helpless as the Witch mocks him before plunging a knife into him.

When all the powers of evil have left, Lucy and Susan come out of hiding to weep and mourn over the lifeless body of their dead friend. As they finally turn to go, suddenly they hear behind them a great crack. Turning, the girls are shocked to see the Stone Table is cracked and Aslan's body is gone. Then, rising majestically with the dawn, they glimpse Aslan – alive and glorious.

“Aren't you dead then, dear Aslan?” said Lucy.

“Not now,” said Aslan.

“But what does it all mean?” asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer.

“It means,” said Aslan, “...that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards”²

The Chronicles of Narnia may be a fantasy story. But the message is real and true. For you and I, like Edmund, have been tricked and tempted. We've been sold the lie that God does not exist, that Jesus is just another teacher, that you can believe anything or nothing. We've given ourselves over to selfishness and sin. We've betrayed God and one another. According to the ancient Law we deserve eternal separation from God. Once we've fallen into this trap, there is nothing we can do to get out, no way to bridge the gulf of our sin.

But there is a deeper plan from before the dawn of time. A pure and sinless person who is fully God and fully human can save us from this separation, from sin, from ourselves by taking our place.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:8-11

Jesus came down from heaven and suffered the lowest, most shameful death. But even more, He took upon Himself the weight of all our sin. Then He rose again and ascended to the throne of God. Today, He reigns. And He is strong enough to make your life significant. He is strong enough to lead you through the problems you face. He is strong enough to save you for eternity.

The question is: will you let Him? Will you surrender your life to the One who surrendered His for you? Will you lay down your life at the feet of the One who laid down His life for you? One day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Why wait until then? Why not start today?

² Ibid., pg. 159-160.