

Narnia part 1 12-4-05

On December 9th, Disney Studios will release a major theatrical release *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is an adaptation of C.S. Lewis' children's fantasy by the same name. The movie is based on one of the seven children's books about the world of Narnia, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. During the last 8 weeks leading up to the movie, the collection has been number one on the New York Times children's fiction bestseller list. Lewis "was one of the best-known and most influential writers of the previous century. Translated into at least thirty languages, his works have sold more than two hundred million copies worldwide—with the *Narnia* stories accounting for half that number. Nearly all of Lewis's thirty-eight books are still in print, and for decades they have sold more than a million copies a year around the globe." Dr. Anne C. Daly

Lewis was born in 1898 in Belfast to a middle-class family. He was a soldier in World War 1. His entrance test to Oxford had the highest grade ever received to that date. He graduated with honors and went on to teach English Literature there. He was considered an expert in Medieval and Renaissance literature. J.R.R. Tolkein referred to Lewis as "a scholar, a poet, a philosopher" and "after a long pilgrimage," a "lover...of Our Lord."

Lewis, Tolkein and several other friends formed a writer's club called *The Inklings*. They would meet in Lewis's classrooms or at a local pub, discuss events in the world, and read their unpublished works to one another. Tolkein and Lewis agreed that if they were going to find stories they would like to read, they would have to write them themselves. It was in this group that works like *Lord of the Rings* was first read aloud. Wouldn't it have been a pleasure to have sat in the next booth and to have overheard some, of what we now consider, classics for the first time! It was probably in this gathering that Lewis began to be inspired to write his own fantasy.

I have no doubt that the movie will be a great success. Some of the biggest blockbusters are G or PG movies to which the whole family can feel comfortable seeing. If the movie portrays positive values it is even more successful. As *The Passion* showed, there is an appetite for movies with Biblical values or themes. Combine the Biblical theme with PG rating and quality production and you will have a series of record smashing hits. No one knows for sure or not if the production will stay faithful to the book, but there are indications that it will, as Lewis' stepson, Douglas Gresham, is deeply involved in the making of the movie.

Lewis never claimed to be a Theologian, but he did know the power of stories to go beyond the defenses of the mind. He had experienced this personally. Teaching literature, he saw the way stories shaped the way we think. He had acquired a double major in philosophy and English literature. This uniquely equipped him to write such works as the Screwtape Letters, and Mere Christianity. During the bombing of London in World War 2, Professor Lewis had four children come to stay with him in his country estate. Amazed at how few stories they knew, he set about writing a story that would capture their imagination. And so he began to write about that very setting, four children in an old professor's mansion.

Lewis believed that the best way to influence the world was not so much in writing Christian literature, of which he was quite gifted, but in writing secular literature imbued with the Christian worldview. He believed that this was the way around the walls that resisted Christian beliefs just as Jesus used parables. Listen to what Jesus said about His use of stories. ¹³*This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."* Matthew 13:13 (NIV) When confronted with doctrine or theology, some have already built up walls of defense so that they are unable to hear or see. Jesus' parables enabled them to hear what they would have otherwise resisted hearing.

Think about the parables we have studied recently. Jesus could have said, "I am the Son of God and heir of all. Give me the honor and reverence that is due to me or suffer the consequences." Instead, He told the parable of the man that rented out his vineyard. (Matthew 21:33-40) The message was the same, but many more were able to hear what Jesus said in story form.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis is not teaching theology. He is telling a story about our journey to salvation. He is telling a story of redemption in another world similar to our own. He is not teaching doctrine, but he is slipping around our defenses with pictures backed by his own understanding of the Word of God.

In the rest of today's and next week's message, I want to share with you the doctrine behind the movie. I will not tell you to go see it before I have reviewed it, but I believe that next Sunday I will be encouraging you to go with a friend. Unlike *The Passion*, we do not have to tell them it is a Christian movie. It is a children's fantasy that presents the gospel in another world. If it is anything like the book, it will have sneaked past their walls and slipped the Gospel message right into their hearts. They may even ask questions that will give you a chance to share. They will probably ask you why you are crying. I think God is giving us another opportunity to reach out to those who we would otherwise not be able to reach. (Ephesians 5:16)

The story begins as the four children explore an eccentric old professor's home. Lucy, one of the four, finds a whole world inside a wardrobe, the world of Narnia. She stepped into the wardrobe only to find that the back of it opened into a strange world covered in snow. The world of Narnia is a make believe world in which the author, C.S. Lewis, conveys Biblical truth and prophecy in the form of a children's fantasy. That imaginary world of Narnia was just a step away from our own world.

As fascinating as it sounds, we actually are surrounded by a world that we cannot see. In the Bible, people have discovered their own portals from this world into another one, one with fascinating creatures, even more fascinating than the ones in Narnia. Narnia is Lewis' shadow of our own world, past, present and future.

One of the earliest ventures into that real spiritual world, which is also just a step away from our own, is the story in the book of Job. A very good man was the target of the greatest force of evil from that realm. (Job 1:6-9) The story of Job tells us that the world that surrounds us intersects with our own to test and teach us. That seems

Commented [notes1]: 33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" Matthew 21:33-40 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. Job 1:6-9 (NIV)

to be the very reason that the four children were allowed to venture into Narnia, to test and teach them.

In the end of Job's story, Job had his own venture through the portal and encountered God. The revelation in that world broke the prideful defense of Job. His vision of God made Job realize his own needy condition. The awe of the encounter forever changed him. (Job 42:5-6)

Many others in Scripture ventured through that portal, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, John the Beloved, and others. What they saw there always seemed difficult for them to describe. They only had things they were familiar with to relate to. For each of them, the encounter seemed to drain them of their strength and cause them to realize their moral condition was much worse than they imagined. (Isaiah 6:5)

Elisha, the prophet, looked into that world of the spirit and even prayed that his servant's eyes could be open to see it so that his fears would be vanquished. An army had been sent to capture them. ¹⁵ *When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.* ¹⁶ *"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* ¹⁷ *And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.* 2 Kings 6:15-17 (NIV) A glimpse into that world set the heart of his servant at rest. There are probably many times in our lives when a glimpse like that would do the same for us.

The author of Hebrews tells us that this world surrounds us. Though few people enter through a wardrobe like door to see it in this life, those in that world watch us as we live our lives in this earthly realm. They surround us like spectators in a stadium. You are being watched! ¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)

He concludes that we should give this race of life all we have, not getting entangled with temporal things, things that would slow us down. Just as the four children had a destiny in Narnia, we have a race marked out for each of us as well. There really is an eternal world all around us. It is not a fantasy world. In fact, it is more real than our own. (1 John 2:17)

There is a way in which we can enter that world. It is through prayer. We can enter that realm in the spirit and present our requests to God. (Hebrews 4:16) We can tune our hearts to hear the Spirit of God as we go about our daily lives. Though our physical senses do not see that realm, our spirit can live in communion with it, either for good or for evil. The essence of faith is believing that God lives in that realm and desires to be in a relationship with us. Faith believes something you cannot experience physically.

If you read the experience of those prophets of God who perceived it through their physical senses, you would not really desire to go through what they went through. As fascinating as it would be, our earthly bodies were not made to survive living in that

Commented [notes4]: 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

realm. (Daniel 10:7-10) We are not meant to be there in these earth suits. However, the day is coming when our earth suit will be changed into one that is designed for that realm. Then you will be fully able to enjoy forever the realm that surrounds us even now. Are you preparing for that day by living in faith today? (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

In Lucy's first encounter with a creature of Narnia, Mr. Tumnus, he told her, "It is winter in Narnia, and has been for ever so long." Later in the story, we find that the Great Witch had cast a spell over Narnia so that winter never ends, but Christmas never arrives. She had gained a position of supreme authority over Narnia.

In the world in which we live, we have the pleasure of four seasons, but there is a curse over our world. There is chill of evil that permeates every part of the planet. There is a curse that makes Murphy's Law seem tame. According to the Bible, that curse came when Adam gave up his authority to rule over the world. He gave up his authority when he opened himself up to Satan's distortion of God's intentions. (Genesis 3:4-5) God had given Adam authority over creation. (Genesis 1:28) He was to care for it as the Prince of this world.

When Satan convinced Eve, and through her Adam, to rebel against God, his conquest of man earned him the title Adam held. When Adam sinned, he became a servant of sin. (John 8:34) The enemy of God claimed him and all that was his. Unlike Narnia, the curse did not come from the evil side. The curse came from God. Instead of an endless winter, God cursed the productivity of the earth. In spite of all our technology, we are still working 40-60 hours a week to survive. The curse continues in spite of all man's efforts to nullify it. Women would have pain in childbirth. Where life was once unhindered, decay and death became the new rule.¹⁶ *To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*¹⁷ *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* Genesis 3:16-19 (NIV)

Why would God curse the earth? There had to be consequences for sin. Satan's tactic for controlling the sons of men is to get them to love the earth, the temporal cursed condition. (1 John 2:15) When death and decay dominated all creation, God was insuring that humanity would have to look beyond this fallen world to the realm of the Spirit. It insured that we would never get used to, or be satisfied with things as they are. We needed to physically see that something is terribly wrong with our world and with us. The curse makes that very plain, as plain as winter in Narnia. Something has to change. We need someone to take us back to the conditions we had before the curse, before decay, before the endless winter of Narnia. (Galatians 3:13)

The faun man, Mr. Tumnus, lured Lucy to his cave. There he tried to put her to sleep so that he could deliver her up to the White Witch. His conscience got the best of him and he confessed his plan. He told Lucy that the White Witch "has all of Narnia under

Commented [notes8]: 7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. 10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. Daniel 10:7-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. John 8:34 (KJV)

Commented [notes13]: 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Galatians 3:13 (NIV)

her thumb." The White Witch is symbolic of Satan. We find, in the words of Jesus, recognition that Satan is now the Prince of this World having stolen the title from Adam. (John 16:11) The White Witch calls herself the Queen of Narnia.

It is significant that Lewis called her white. According to the Bible, Satan is also called Lucifer. (Isaiah 14:12) The name means "lights". It is believed that he was originally one of the most beautiful of archangels, in charge of leading the worship of God. Culturally we portray him as the red horned man with the pointed tail. The Bible has a very different picture. The Apostle Paul warns that Satan can appear as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14) Because something looks good does not always mean it is good. In Satan's first encounter with man, the Bible tells us that he is craftier than any other being. Part of his craftiness is the way he makes evil appear to be good. (Genesis 3:1)

The world of Narnia was under her thumb. This world is under the thumb of Satan. You only have to turn on the news to see his devastating effect upon our world. As beautiful as he is, his goal is to kill, steal, and destroy. (John 10:10) People often blame devastation and tragedy on God. It is really our fault, for it was man that gave up his position as Prince of the earth. Humanity's continued rebellion against God's rule in their life only adds to Satan's destructive influence. ¹ *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,* ² *in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* Ephesians 2:1-2 (NIV) ¹⁹ *We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.* 1 John 5:19 (NIV)

The world is under his thumb. Just as Mr. Tumnus could choose to break free from the White Witch's influence, we too are given the opportunity to escape Satan's control through the cross of Christ. One day the whole earth will be liberated from Satan's control, just as Narnia would be liberated. (Romans 8:20-21)

C.S. Lewis knew the journey the children in his book were on all too well. His mother died of cancer when he was a boy. No logical arguments for Christianity could get around the pain in his heart. In his teens, he called himself a "convinced atheist". He regarded the Bible story as another myth on par with the Norse and Greek myths he loved so much. Nevertheless, after reading G.K. Chesterton and conversing with his friends, he made a step toward believing. He became a Theist. He believed there was a God, but he could not bring himself to believe that it was the God of the Bible.

One evening he stayed up late talking with his friend Tolkien. He spoke of his conviction that the Bible was a myth. Tolkien responded with the beginning of the Gospel of Luke. It names historical figures, actual locations, events in historical place and time. (Luke 2:1-4) Yes, Christianity was another story of a god that entered the world, died, and rose from death. The difference is that all those stories of mythology were only to prepare us for the real event of history. After returning home, he became amazed at the God who, in his own words would, "open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape". To Lewis myth became fact. The word became flesh, and this atheist became one of the most ardent defenders of the Gospel.

Commented [notes15]: 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. John 16:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! Isaiah 14:12 (KJV)

Commented [notes17]: 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Genesis 3:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:20-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. Luke 2:1-4 (NIV)

We are all on our own journey, like Lewis, like the children through the wardrobe and into Narnia with a destiny foretold by prophets. We have a destiny. Lewis had a destiny, one that John Paul II said Lewis knew and fulfilled. There is a spiritual world that surrounds us. There is a curse upon this world. There is an evil power that brings death and destruction. Lewis married late in life. After a few years of marriage, his wife died of cancer. He cared for several people in his home, one of which was the mother of one of his friends that was killed in World War One. He promised the dying friend that he would care for her. She was a bitter person who was always a trial to Lewis. But people who knew Lewis said he always had a sense of humor and was a joy to be with. He had learned that in spite of the pain of living in a fallen world, our Savior walks with us as we pass through it. Our hope is in the answer that Lewis discovered. The good news of the Gospel is real. I hope you will join us next week for the rest of the story.