

KNOWING THE CROSS IN NARNIA

Rom. 3:21-26

Col. 3:21,22

March 8, 2020

This Lent I want to look at the cross—what the death of Jesus means, to us, to our God, to the principalities and powers, as Paul says. The fullest text for the *atonement* meaning, and there are three other important meanings of the cross: as in, the defeat of Satan, the victory over death, and the vindication of God.

Anyway, the fullest scripture for the atonement is our passage here in Romans. It's also the deepest and densest.

So I'll use my favorite metaphor: C.S. Lewis' s book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. It was, in recent years, made into a movie. Some of you may have seen it. I love to tell the story from Lewis himself, because it catches me; I hope it will you, too, today. It stirs my soul in places. So here we go.

Aslan the Lion created the Land of Narnia. It was a land of beauty and peace, but the White Witch was now ruling. How she came to power, we just don't know. Why Aslan left the land of Narnia, we just don't know. What we do know is that Lucy Pevensie discovers the land of Narnia by walking into a wardrobe, a closet, that's a big piece of furniture, right? Before they built houses with lots of closets, people folded and hung their clothes in wardrobes. Well, Lucy pushes past the fur coats which become fir trees and she finds herself in a wintry world where she meets Mr. Tumnus, a faun—half-man, half goat—who tells her about the White Witch who is the Queen of Narnia.

Lucy asks, "The White Witch? Who is she?"

Mr. Tumnus answered, "Why, it is she who has got all Narnia under her thumb. It's she who makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!"

So Narnia is a world where we find great good and great evil competing for the allegiance of souls.

Edmund Pevensie, the brat, the third of the four children, sneaks into Narnia and meets the White Witch, who introduces herself as the Queen of Narnia. It's cold and he's only wearing pajamas and a housecoat, so she invites him to sit beside her in her sleigh. She wraps her fur about him and asks if he's hungry. She magically creates his favorite treat, Turkish Delight. It's kind of a flavored gel candy, usually has some nuts in it, and is covered with powdered sugar. He gobbles the whole bowlful.

"She knew, though Edmund did not, that this was enchanted Turkish Delight, and that anyone who tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves."

Edmund's dilemma is that of everyone. Addicted to sins that never satisfy, the wholesome, gratifying pleasures of life lose their charm.

She sends him back to his world with the command that he return with his brother Peter and sisters, Susan and Lucy. What he doesn't know is the prophecy that when the four humans, the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, sit on the four thrones at Cair Paravel, the Queen will be doomed. The Witch must kill at least one of the children.

The queen rules Narnia. It is always winter and never Christmas. But Mr. Beaver tells the children that Aslan is on the move. The children have never heard of Aslan.

"Who is Aslan?" asks Susan.

“Aslan?” says Mr. Beaver. “Why, don’t you know? He’s the King. He’s the Lord of the whole wood but not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father’s time. But the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this time.

“Is he a man?” asks Lucy?

“Aslan a man!” says 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!” says Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“Is he safe?” presses Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver, “Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”

Aslan is a god-like creature: eternal, powerful, good. And Lewis keeps us guessing about him. The mystery gives us pause, makes us wonder, “Is Aslan benevolent?” He isn’t safe . . . but he is good. He is not a tame lion. He is ferocious. Lewis helps us see Jesus in a different light. He is dangerously good--like the Christ child in the manger who seemed so helpless, yet he terrified Herod the Great. Jesus poses a threat to many people—perhaps even to me or you.

Aslan shifts our paradigm. He shakes our categories. Here is a Deity who is awesome to behold, deserving of reverential fear. He is a lion to love, yet a lion with razor claws and teeth and a roar that will terrify.

The battle is brewing. The armies are massing. Good versus evil, with Narnia in the balance. But first, the Witch asks for a conference with Aslan. She walks into the camp.

“You have a traitor there, Aslan,” says the Witch. Of course, everyone present knew that she meant Edmund. And what would Aslan do with—or to -- Edmund the traitor? Is he doomed?

Well,” said Aslan. “His offence was not against you.”

“Have you forgotten the Deep Magic?” asks the Witch.

“Let us say I *have* forgotten it,” answers Aslan gravely. “Tell us of this Deep Magic .”

“Tell you?” said the Witch, her voice growing suddenly shriller. “Tell you what is written on that very Table of Stone which stands beside us? Tellyou what is written in letters deep as a spear is long on the fire-stones on the Secret Hill? Tell you what is engraved on the scepter of the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea? You at least know the Magic the Emperor put into Narnia at the very beginning. You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill And so, that human creature is mine. His life is forfeit to me. His blood is my property.”

According to the Deep Magic which is inscribed on the Stone Table, a massive square rock platform, every traitor belongs to the Witch.

You probably get it. The Deep Magic parallels the Mosaic Law, inscribed not on a Stone Table, but on Stone Tablets. According to that Law, every soul that sins shall surely die.

Aslan negotiates a deal with the Witch. He will take Edmund’s place. The King of Beasts will die in the place of the traitor. The Witch is gleeful. She had a look of “fierce joy on her face.”

Aslan leaves the camp and surrenders Himself to the Witch and her wicked brood. They bind him and mock him and cut off his mane. Then the Witch pierces his heart and kills him.

Aslan is a substitute. The heart of the Gospel is substitution. Jesus died in our place. Peter, in 1 Peter 3, explains this great exchange.

For Christ also died for sins once or all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

The verse goes on to say, “the just for the unjust.” Jesus was just, righteous. He died for the unjust, the unrighteous. This is the element of substitution. Note the emphasis of the character of the parties involved. It isn’t fair that the just should die in the place of the unjust. It wasn’t fair that Aslan, the king of this world, would die in Edmund’s place. It was a monstrous injustice.

But there was a purpose for this substitutionary, once-for-all death.

Peter says it happened, that He might bring us to God.” Jesus’ death opens the throne room door. He ushers us into the presence of the Great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. His substitutionary death results in reconciliation with God.

The Deep Magic of Narnia (the Law of Moses) demanded that every traitor belongs to the Witch. But there is a Deeper Magic at work in Narnia.

Susan and Lucy went with Aslan that fateful night. At a safe distance, they watched him suffer and die on the Stone Table. Then, when the evil horde left the scene, they walked over to the dead body of Aslan. They mourned.

It was time to go. The last battle for Narnia would soon begin. But at that moment, they heard “a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a

giant's plateThe Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.

"Who's done this?" cries Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"

"Yes!" says a great voice from behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked around. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.

"Oh Aslan!" both children, staring up at him, almost as much frightened as they were glad.

"But what does it all mean?" asks Susan when they were somewhat calmer.

"It means," says Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known 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."

C.S. Lewis explained the meaning of the Deeper Magic in a letter to a friend, "It is the rule of the universe that others can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That is why Christ's suffering for us is not a mere theological dodge, but the supreme case of the law that governs the whole world: and when they mocked him by saying, 'He saved others, himself he cannot save,' they were really uttering, little as they know it, the ultimate law of the spiritual world."

The White Witch did not realize that there *was* a Deeper Magic. Aslan obeys the Deep Magic of the Stone, and initiates the Deeper Magic, which we know as the New Covenant. Out of his death comes life for all. He reverses the curse of Adam. The winter of Narnia gives way to springtime forevermore.

Everyone of us is an Edmund, a traitor.

Everyone of us has tasted and yearned and become addicted to—in Edmunds case, Turkish Delight. In our case, whichever sin pursues *us*.

Everyone of us belong to the Evil One as lawful prey. Our lives are forfeit to Evil. Our blood is Satan's property.

But we can escape the curse of the Deep Magic if we invoke the Deeper Magic From Before the Dawn of Time. If we believe that the willing victim who knew no treachery was killed in the traitor's stead, we shall be saved. Believe that Jesus is your substitute and died in your place and you shall be saved.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Amen.