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Remembering *Clive Staples Lewis*

By

Mark McGee

Introduction

Clive Staples Lewis, known by most people as C.S. Lewis, was born in Belfast, Ireland on November 29, 1898. He died almost 65 years later in Oxford, England on November 22, 1963 (50 years ago this week). Millions of people know him because of what he said and wrote. This photo is of the statute of C.S. Lewis in front of the wardrobe from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It's located in East Belfast where Lewis was born. The book is part of the famous Narnia series Lewis wrote between 1949 and 1954. More than 100 million copies have been sold in more than 45 languages.

I wanted to take a few minutes and thank Mr. Lewis for planting something in my mind and heart that finally bloomed when I was a young man. I, like Lewis, became an atheist as a teenager. Also like Lewis, I became a Christian after investigating the claims of Christianity as an adult. I was introduced to Lewis' Narnia series as a child. I loved the stories of the adventures of Peter, Edmund, Susan, Lucy, and Aslan. I remembered those adventures many years later after becoming a theist and Christian. I finally understood what Lewis had told me many years before.

Mere Christianity, Surprised by Joy, The Screwtape Letters, and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe are among my favorite C.S. Lewis books. May the following quotes from the books be a blessing to you as we remember his life and his words.

Mere Christianity

“If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning.”

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”

“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great

human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

“The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”

“Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”

“Now is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It won’t last forever. We must take it or leave it.

“God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.”

Surprised by Joy

“A young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.”

“Really, a young Atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side. You must not do, you must not even try to do, the will of the Father unless you are prepared to “know of the doctrine.” All my acts, desires, and thoughts were to be brought into harmony with universal Spirit. For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.”

“You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction

for a chance of escape? The words “compelle intrare,” compel them to come in, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them; but, properly understood, they plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.”

“I am struck here by the curious mixture of justice and injustice in our lives. We are blamed for our real faults but usually not on the right occasions.”

“Shut your mouth; open your eyes and ears. Take in what is there and give no thought to what might have been there or what is somewhere else. That can come later, if it must come at all. (And notice here how the true training for anything whatever that is good always prefigures and, if submitted to, will always help us in, the true training for the Christian life).”

“Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not ‘a religion’, nor ‘a philosophy.’ It is the summing up and actuality of them all.”

The Screwtape Letters

“It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

“It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”

“Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

“Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean, the real sciences) as a defence against Christianity. They will positively encourage him to think about realities he can’t touch and see. “

“A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing.”

“Surely you know that if a man can’t be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighbourhood looking for the church that ‘suits’ him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.”

“Nearly all vices are rooted in the future. Gratitude looks to the past and love to the present; fear, avarice, lust and ambition look ahead.”

“The Future is, of all things, the thing least like eternity. It is the most temporal part of time—for the Past is frozen and no longer flows, and the Present is all lit up with eternal rays.”

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

“Do not cite the Deep Magic to me, Witch. I was there when it was written.”

“If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most, or else just silly.”

“To the glistening eastern sea, I give you Queen Lucy the Valiant. To the great western woods, King Edmund the Just. To the radiant southern sun, Queen Susan the Gentle. And to the clear northern skies, I give you King Peter the Magnificent. Once a king or queen of Narnia, always a king or queen of Narnia. May your wisdom grace us until the stars rain down from the heavens.”

“Always winter but never Christmas.”

“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight, At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more, When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death, And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”

“Lucy looked and saw that Aslan had just breathed on the feet of the stone giant. It’s all right!” shouted Aslan joyously. ‘Once The feet are put right, all the rest of him will follow.’”

“In our adversity, God shouts to us.”

“If things are real, they’re there all the time.”

How true, Mr. Lewis, how true!

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