

Lives Worth Imitating – C. S. Lewis

July 21st, 2019

Calling out to you history buffs out there – anyone recall what significant event happened on November 22, 1963? President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. I recall sitting in my 3rd grade class watching much of the coverage of his funeral on TV that week.

There was another death that occurred in the shadow of President Kennedy's assassination. That's the death of what many have called the greatest Christian writer and theologian of the 20th century. That's the death of C. S. Lewis.

I remember my first exposure to C.S. Lewis was my freshman year at Minnesota Bible College. I wanted to fit in with all the other intellectuals on campus and so I picked up a copy of C.S Lewis book *Miracles* and read it through and after reading it quickly realized I understood hardly anything of what I just read and gave up trying to fit in with the other intellectuals on campus.

My second most impactful experience with C. S. Lewis was using his book out of the Narnia series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as the basis for our curriculum at 5th-6th grade camp. I still remember the night we re-enacted the death and resurrection of Aslan on the stone table. It was so dramatic that several of the campers fell off of their chairs in shock. Through that experience those campers felt the sense of power and wonder that I believe made C.S. Lewis such an influential writer and communicator.

On September 8th, 1947, Lewis appeared on the cover of Time magazine.

Christianity Today put C. S. Lewis at the top of their list of the most influential Christian writers of the 20th century.

I'd like to quickly run through some key moments in Lewis' life to help you get a sense of how God used circumstances in his life to form him into such a powerful witness to the truth of Christianity.

The Life of C.S. Lewis

- Clive Staples Lewis was born on November 29th, 1898 in Belfast, Ireland to Albert and Florence.
- His father, Albert, was a successful attorney and they both read a lot. Their house was filled with books and C.S. consumed such classics as Conan Doyle, Mark Twain and Longfellow.
- At age 4, Lewis' dog, *Jacksie*, was killed by a car and he promptly announced that he wanted to be now known as "*Jacksie*", which was later reduced to "*Jack*".
- One of the rooms in their large house had an old wardrobe where Jack and his older brother, Warren, created an imaginary world of animals who could talk (precursor to Narnia). C.S. began composing short stories about these animals and their escapades.
- At age 7, Jack's older brother, Warren, was sent off to boarding school leaving only Jack at home with his mom and dad. This caused him to withdraw and spend even more time reading.
- Shortly before he turned 10, Jack's mother died of cancer. Her death convinced him that the God he encountered in the Bible was, *if not cruel, at least a vague abstraction*.
- His father send Jack off to a boarding school run by a cruel, mentally ill headmaster and after that school was closed he jumped around to various schools. The result is that he got into the occult and other not helpful beliefs and practices.
- Later Jack was sent to study with William T. Kirkpatrick, a brilliant teacher and an avowed atheist. Jack flourished under his teaching. Under his teaching Jack became an avowed atheist (at age 14).
- He was awarded a scholarship to Oxford University at age 19.
- Later that year, Jack enlisted in the Irish army. There he befriended a fellow soldier, Paddy Moore and the two took a vow that if either died, the other would care for the dead man's family. Paddy was killed and Jack took care of Paddy's mother, until her death.
- Lewis read a book by George MacDonald called *Phantastes*, which talks about a fantasy journey but clearly is referring to one's spiritual journey. He later said that the reading of this book, along with a couple of others, began the process of him coming back to God. He also began to notice that the

writers he most respected were Christians. In 1929, at age 31, alone in his room, he admitted that God is God. He later describes that night, *"On that night, I was perhaps, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."* It's hard to admit you're wrong.

- About 2 years later, C.S. Lewis became a Christian, largely from talks with Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien.
- He began to teach at Magdalen College and became an enormously popular lecturer.
- During the Second World War he was invited to give a series of talks over BBC radio about Christianity. These talks were later put into a book form called *Mere Christianity*. This book was voted the best book of the 20th century by Christianity Today in 2000.
- 1940 he wrote *"The Problem of Pain"* and 1943 *"The Screwtape Letters"*
- *"The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe"* published in 1950 (1st of 7 stories in The Chronicles of Narnia). This allowed him to reach a whole new audience. He received hundreds of letters from fans and answered every one.
- Later in March, 1957, (at age 59), Lewis married a fan, *Joy Gresham*, who was a non-practicing Jew and a former atheist. But she became a believer largely because of reading Lewis' books. When they were married, Lewis prayed for her healing and miraculously, the cancer went into remission for almost 3 years before her death in 1960. Lewis writes about the powerful impact her death had on him in *"A Grief Observed"*.
- Lewis died in his home on November 22, 1963, the day that President Kennedy was assassinated. One person, who knew him well, described his life as, *"He was the most thoroughly converted man I have ever known."*

I believe that during my time preaching, I've likely quoted C.S. Lewis more than anyone else (and I doubt I'm the only preacher that's true of). Why? Because he had an incredibly *keen intellect* and yet from everything I've read, he was still quite a *humble man* who *enjoyed life fully*. He once described himself to a young admirer this way: *"I'm a tall, fat, rather bald, red-faced, double-chinned, black-haired man who has a deep voice and wear glasses for reading."* I've read that his clothes were often wrinkly his jackets were very well worn with food stains on them and his shoes were often very scuffed up.

He was very generous. When his books became best sellers, he began to bring in a lot of money personally. He could have easily enjoyed it and lived quite well, but instead he established a charitable fund for these earnings and gave away 80% of what came in to support impoverished families, he underwrote education fees for orphans and poor seminarians as well as various charities and church ministries.

Once he became a follower of Christ he was *all in*. In fact he often received criticism from other Christians for his deep commitment to following Christ in every area of his life and for unashamedly preaching, teaching and writing about his faith in Christ.

Quotes from C.S. Lewis:

- *"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."* **Mere Christianity** Lewis is describing this deep aching in your soul for satisfaction that nothing in this world can fill.
- *"The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us."* God's love for you is not based on what your level of "goodness" before God. God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you there. He invites you into a life where He works from the inside out making you into the person He created you to be and awakens to you His plan for your life that He's equipped you to live.

- *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."* **The Weight of Glory** Often in the Old Testament God asks why the Israelites and also us choose to satisfy ourselves with things that fail us repeatedly. **Jeremiah 2:13 (NIV)** *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*
- *"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it."* **The Great Divorce** This counters the argument that asks, "How could an all loving God send anyone to Hell forever. Lewis understood that God puts the choice to each of us as to where we want to spend eternity. If you don't want God or believe in God, then He's not going to force you to spend eternity with Him. He's going to honor that choice.
- *The safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."* **The Screwtape Letters** Satan is described in Scripture as masquerading around as an angel of light. He doesn't come right out and attack you and tries to beat you into submission. He's much more subtle than that. He's like a fisherman who tries various types of bait until he finds one you will bite on. Satan wants to lure you into a sense of complacency in your walk with the Lord. Because if he can get you to be comfortable of complacent in your walk then you become no threat to him and his kingdom and agenda here on earth and in your life.
- *"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."* This afternoon over 20 guys are going to be going to the Twins game together. And if they win, it's going to be a great celebration that will be enriched because we have each other to high five and celebrate together. And that's what Lewis is describing worship as. When we're really excited about someone or something we just have to let it out in some form. And worship is that activity we use to express our love and appreciation for God.
- *"True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."* That's huge. You don't have to constantly put yourself down to be right before God. God created you as His amazing son or daughter and we ought to relish in that. But the real child of God, as they appreciate who they are, are filled up and freed up to do the same for others. To reach out to others out of fullness to encourage them. **Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*
- *"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?"* When Lewis' dog and mother died, he turned his back on God, because why would God allow such tragedies in the world. God seemed unfair. And yet, he later it dawned on him that somewhere he'd got this sense of fairness. Where did that come from except from an outside source – God Himself. It's your moral conscience that makes you realize when you see a tragedy that this isn't right. But where did you get that sense of right and wrong from? Lewis attributes it to God.
- *"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.” — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity Who is Jesus to you? He’s pointing out here that Jesus never left the option of us accepting him as anything other than Lord and God.

This sermon series is about looking at Christians in history that are great examples for us to imitate. What can we imitate about C.S. Lewis. Not many of us will be great apologists for the Christian faith, nor successful writers, or college professors. So what’s our takeaway from the life of C.S. Lewis that we can apply to our lives? I’m going to close with a quote from John Piper in his takeaway of the impact of C.S. Lewis.

“Lewis captured the wonder of the world. He just looked at the world and said, “Isn’t that amazing?” Look. He simply looked at the two great books of God – the Bible and the world – and he taught us the sheer wonder of the thisness.” **John Piper**

I would encourage you to get one of Lewis’ books and read it and begin to think deeply about God and the world and your interaction with both of them. And wake up every morning prepared to allow God to wow you with who He is and what He wants to do for you and in you and through you. Live a daily life of wonder.

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- At age 10, Jack's mother _____
- Jack was sent to _____
- At age 14, Jack became a self-proclaimed _____
- Jack enlisted in the Irish army and fought on the front lines
- At age 31, he became a _____
- At age 33, he became a _____
- During WW II he gave a series of talks on _____
- At age 59, Jack married Joy Gresham and 4 years later _____

- Jack had a keen _____, was _____ and enjoyed life _____
- Jack was very _____
- Jack was “_____” as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Quotes from C. S. Lewis:

Which quote impacted you the most and why?

In what ways are you inspired to imitate C.S. Lewis' life?

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