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Edmund Pevensie and the Character of the Redeemed

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INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume II

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Second
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Taylor University 1999

Upland, Indiana

Edmund Pevensie and the Character of the Redeemed

Jill Ogline

Edmund Pevensie and the Character of the Redeemed

by Jill Oglie

At a crossroads in Narnia, a traveler may find him or herself turning toward the mountain pass into Archenland, the wooded expanse of Lantern Waste, the rushing currents of the Great River flowing past the fords of Beruna, or a starswept and unfamiliar wonder—a gateway to unchartable territory. Predictability and the concrete are concepts foreign to the Narnian soul. The ability to believe is not dependent on the capacity to explain, for the reductionistic side effects of the Enlightenment never entered this land. Enlightenment of minds, hearts and social perceptions is more common among the Talking Beasts than in the realm commonly referred to as the “real world.” But reality cannot be defined in terms of only that which can be touched, tasted or heard. Truth from outside of the empirical realm is both welcomed and expected. Most Narnians, though certainly not all, embrace the presence of magic and transcendence in their world.

Near the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Peter makes a statement that in the empirical world would be taken for absolute truth. In discussing the possibility of Lucy’s madness with Professor Kirke, he asserts, “Well, Sir, if things are real, they’re

there all the time” (*The Lion...*45). However, Professor Kirke, as the reader later learns, has been shaped not only by the world of England but the world of Narnia as well. He counters Peter’s pragmatic declaration with the completely unanticipated question, “are they?” In order to enter Narnia, a son of Adam or daughter of Eve must lay aside his or her own limitations on reality. Earth is simply too small of a framework to use to understand this world in which animals marry and kings depend upon unicorns for advice.

In the same fashion, a scholar attempting to probe the depths of C.S. Lewis’s created world soon finds him or herself in a realm in which the tools of academia prove insufficient.

Any literary critic can analyze the use of imagery and the role of fantasy in the Chronicles, many can explore the parallels to biblical narratives, but few are able to read with the purity of a child. Of all potential visitors to Narnia, the typical grown-up is the least likely to gain admittance. Consumed with matters of temporal and worldly importance such as money, societal functions and the other prosaic issues of life, the stereotypical adult renders him or herself incapable of seeing the door to Narnia. Lewis himself passionately

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hated “grown-up” conversation, believing it to be endless, pointless, too jocular and fraught with an ever-present artificiality (*Surprised by Joy* 125). Even if miraculously transplanted through the vehicle of magic’s power, the condition of one’s heart predetermines the clarity of his or her vision. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Uncle Andrew’s warped and prejudiced mind turns Aslan’s beautiful song into a series of beastly roars and snarls. He blinds himself to the beauty all around him. One must lay down his or her earthly sophistication, strictly empirical wisdom and worldly maturity before humbly requesting entrance to Aslan’s country. As Eustace and Jill recognized, charms and spells could not get them to Narnia; Aslan himself is the only bridge. All comings and goings occur by his permission—one cannot simply decide to go to Narnia and catch the next train.

Similarly, when undertaking any study or analysis of this land, the scholar must remember to ask permission for his or her own entrance. The Narnian world has its own sovereign, Aslan, and its own chronicler, who is of course Lewis himself. The reader should not intrude, placing his or her own limitations or interpretations on the story, but tread with humility—requesting only the discernment to recognize the wisdom and multifaceted layering lying between the covers of the books.

Lewis bristled at both reductionistic and well-meaning attempts to read into his world. The Chronicles were fairy stories, not because they were weak literature or intended only for children but because “sometimes fairy stories may say best what’s to be said” (qtd. in Gibson 145). In his essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” Lewis echoes a point made earlier by his good friend J.R.R. Tolkien in his own essay, “On Fairy-Stories,” that the audience for imaginative tales was not

originally children (qtd. in Hooper 23). It was only after idealism and fantasy became embarrassing and unfashionable for adults that they were relegated to the nursery (Hooper 23). Enjoyment of fairy tales is dependent not upon age but upon personality—they are prized by some children and adults and despised by others (Hooper 23). Though the Chronicles are written to be accessible and exciting for children they contain theological subtleties aimed at the consciousness of an adult reader. The reader who gains the most from the stories is the one who humbly enters the realm with the mind of an adult but the heart of a child.

A child from a Christian home will almost certainly see parallels between the figures of Christ and Aslan (Gibson 145). More than likely, Aslan’s sacrificial death on the Stone Table will call to attention the story of the Crucifixion. The passion of Christ is woven throughout the progression toward death—the tormentors’ ridicule, the violence and hatred of the crowd conflicting so starkly with the patient endurance of the sufferer (Gibson 144). However, there are many differences—the love behind the sacrifice is the same, but not the details of the action itself. Evan K. Gibson draws attention to the fact that whereas Christ died for all of mankind, Aslan lays himself down for the life of one heedless and obstinate little boy, Edmund Pevensie (144). “What we have in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is atonement in Narnia, not an allegory of atonement on Earth. Lewis does not need to write with his eye on Christ’s crucifixion. Instead he is free to show how far the love of God will go by telling a story which has some obvious parallels to the Gospel account, but also some differences” (Gibson 144). As can be seen in many of his personal letters, Lewis himself constantly reminded his admirers that

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his stories were not meant to be taken as allegories (*Letters to Children* 96).

As the catalyst for Aslan's sacrifice and the one deserving of death, the character of Edmund deserves further attention. He is a reflection both of the hopelessness of those under the power of sin and the rejuvenated life of the Redeemed. From the peevish, sulky and selfish boy he is before his encounter with Aslan, he grows into one of the noblest leaders of Narnia, a somewhat grave and quiet man, great in council and judgement—King Edmund the Just (*The Lion...* 181). Edmund first stumbles into Narnia thoroughly by accident; he is following his sister Lucy, intent on further tormenting her about her "imaginary world." He is separated from his parents by the Second World War, fresh from a term at a "horrid" boarding school, which has set in motion within him a chain reaction of selfishness and bullying tendencies (Ford 160).

As the second youngest child, Edmund is at an awkward place within his own family. Resenting Peter's maturity and what he deems condescension toward his own person and Susan's self-appointed mothering role, he unleashes his aggressions toward his older siblings on his younger sister Lucy (Ford 160). Gibson comments that "he is just a small boy whose tendency to selfishness and bullying needs to be checked before it colors his whole life" (136). His selfishness predisposes him against Aslan, the symbol of majesty and purity and makes him an easy target for manipulation by the White Witch. Upon meeting the Witch he instinctively senses her cruelty and depravity, but rationalizes himself into a state of denial. Hoping to be made a prince and placed above his siblings, he convinces himself that no true harm will come to the others, turns his back on the good and sets out in a blinding snowstorm to find the

castle of the White Witch—to betray his brother and sisters.

The afternoon Edmund Pevensie stumbled through the wardrobe onto the silent plain of Lantern Waste marked the beginning of a course of agonizing events that would eventually result in death for Aslan, but the great lion still allows entrance to the boy. Aslan, the reader learns in *The Last Battle*, is the Lord of all, not of simply the Narnians. At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, he eases the sorrow of Edmund and Lucy over the fact that they will never be able to come back to Narnia by gently informing them that he lives in their own world as well as in the Narnian one. In their world he is known by a different name, yet has the same character. They were brought to Narnia not simply to have adventures or aid the Narnians, but in order that they may learn to know him and allow their lives in their own world to be transformed by that knowledge. It is for this reason that Aslan opens the land of the Talking Beasts to Edmund—even though he knows that he himself will suffer through the resulting events, within the human boy will be sown the seeds of a good man (Gibson 136).

The choices Edmund has already made render him ripe to meet the White Witch, who is in a sense similar to the prince of this world. She is a temporal authority, an usurping ruler living in a land rightfully belonging to another. She forbids even the mention of the name of Aslan, for it brings a sense of sickening terror to her soul. During the period in which Edmund turns his back on the good, he experiences similar sensations, though Aslan's name brings comfort to his brother and sisters. She entices him with Turkish Delight, his favorite food. He gorges himself on it until he is utterly sick, yet becomes unable to stop—an excellent portrayal of the addictive nature of

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sin. The original good is lost when it becomes an addiction—sin can corrupt any God-given pleasure. It promises to fill while eternally demanding more, until it destroys its host.

When it becomes clear that Edmund can no longer fulfill her purposes, the Witch prepares to kill him. As Lewis points out elsewhere, in *The Screwtape Letters*, Hell has no love for the souls it entices; it simply devours them, attempting to fill an eternally yawning void. He is rescued from the Witch's knife by a search party sent from Aslan and brought back to the camp of the righteous. The image of Edmund's early morning walk with Aslan is one of the most powerful in the series, precisely for the reason that Lewis does not attempt to describe what occurred between the penitent boy and the Righteous Lord. The deepest repentance is a matter between the Lord and the sinner. It is a matter too personal to be shared even with the reader, who by this point has come to view him or herself as a fellow participant in the story. Lewis's delicate handling of the talk underscores its poignancy. It is enough for the reader to know that it was a talk Edmund remembered all the days of his life and that he was never the same afterward. True repentance is a catalyst for change and Edmund immediately began to reflect more of the image of Aslan and less of his natural self.

According to the Deep Magic, Edmund's treachery lawfully makes him property of the White Witch. His life has become a forfeit and his blood her property. Yet when she comes to execute her sentence, she finds he has found refuge with Aslan. Knowing the strength and sacred nature of the Deep Magic, she taunts him for his sin, believing Aslan to be powerless to protect the prodigal. Edmund stands silently, knowing his job is to wait and obey, now able to look beyond himself. His eyes are

fixed on Aslan and he refuses to look away. Edmund's faith-filled demeanor throughout this encounter vividly mirrors the certainty of the redeemed in the face of Satan's taunting. The redeemed are taught to keep their eyes on Christ and to not look away into the traps of either destructive guilt or flippant disregard for the severity of sin. Because Aslan has assumed responsibility for him, Edmund finds safety and peace. Similarly, in his death, Christ has assumed responsibility for all sinners and all who flee to him find protection and salvation.

Susan and Lucy have an argument as to whether they should tell their brother of the sacrifice that was made for him. Susan maintains that knowing would only bring him indescribable guilt, but Lucy counters that, regardless, he should know. Lewis never shares the outcome of this debate with the reader, but observation of the younger king in his older years seems to provide an answer. During the Pevensie children's second adventure in Narnia there comes a time in which they lack guidance. As they stumble through the woods looking for Caspian's camp, Aslan appears to Lucy in the middle of the night and tells her she must wake the others and tell them to follow her in the opposite direction. He will lead, but the ability of the others to see him will depend upon their willingness to obey. Although he cannot see Aslan, Edmund recalls Lucy's special relationship with the majestic lion and supports her despite his weariness and crankiness. Admitting the foolishness and cruelty of his attitude toward her on their previous visit, he advises their older companions to trust her reliability and is rewarded with being the first, through faith and obedience, to see their Lion Guide.

When Peter challenges Miraz to a duel, it is Edmund he chooses to send to bear the

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summons to his adversary. While he is still a long way off, Miraz's chief advisors, the Lords Glazelle and Sopespian immediately recognize greatness in the warrior's bearing. He is described as having "no look of surrender in his face" and being "a kinglier man than ever Miraz was" (*Prince Caspian* 174-175). After Eustace's transforming experience as a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, it is Edmund whom he seeks as a confidante for his humiliating story. After listening compassionately, Edmund tells Eustace that his remarkable experience has been with Aslan, for he is quick to recognize Aslan's handiwork in the lives of others. When Eustace apologizes for his behavior, Edmund quickly forgives him and attempts to ease his guilt by telling his cousin a bit of his own traitorous behavior during his first visit to Narnia.

Upon being sent back into his own world for the last time, Edmund is the first to grasp that Aslan also lives in his day to day world and that he must come to know him there as well as in Narnia. Edmund exhibits the behavior of a disciple, who having been forgiven himself, is quick to extend mercy to others. His somewhat grave nature makes him a natural confidante and counselor. Having experienced Aslan's work in his own life, he is perceptive in seeing his master's work elsewhere. Yet his compassion does not make him weak, for his appearance strikes fear into those who champion evil.

When the Calormene orphan boy Shasta first meets Edmund, who is at this time a young king, he immediately believes him to be the "nicest sort of grown-up" and wishes he could make a better impression upon the man he admires (*The Horse.....57*). His integrity and free spirit draw others to himself. After the battle of Anvard, when the matter of what to do with the traitorous Rabadash is discussed,

Edmund voices his hopes that he yet may become an honorable man, commenting thoughtfully, "Even a traitor may mend. I have known one that did" (*The Horse....206*). The scars of his own memories do not torment him with guilt, but instead teach him daily to extend forgiveness to others, bear with their weaknesses and believe with all his heart that Aslan can transform them as fully as he himself has been transformed. Edmund, whose face bears the deep etchings of hard-earned wisdom, is a "graver and quieter man than Peter" (*The Lion... 181*). Due to the fact that he was first introduced to the reader neither as grave nor quiet, all of these characteristics seem to indicate that somehow he had come to know of the price Aslan had paid for his life, and had been irrevocably changed.

The redeemed disciple of Jesus Christ is one who is never the same after realizing the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice. There is a gravity in the nature of a redeemed man or woman which serves as a constant reminder of both the sobriety of sin and the unfathomable depth of the love of God. This solemnity does not impound joy or prevent the bearer from playing, laughing or loving, but continually draws his or her attention toward the deeper realities of life. The rejuvenated life is markedly different from the old way of existence, bearing the indelible mark of integrity and honor. Once redeemed, the greatest sinner can overflow with nobility. The transformation of Edmund Pevensie is a tribute to the authentic and supernatural power of loving redemption.

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