**A MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT**

***Surprised By Joy***

You are cheating yourself if you have never read from the works of C. S. Lewis. He is likely known to the general population as the author of the children’s classic series *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, which became so popular that it was released as movies: *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* (2005), *Prince Caspian* (2008), and *The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader* (2010). But Clive Staples Lewis (better known to his friends as Jack) made his greatest impact on the world through his apologetic writings.

Born in Ireland in 1898 he died on the same day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated (Nov. 22, 1963). His mother died when he was 10 years old and he was sent to a boarding school to be educated. He served in the army during World War 1 where he was wounded by exploding shrapnel. He returned to England to teach at Magdalen College, a part of Oxford University, teaching literature and philosophy.

During his teenage years he had been disillusioned about religion and God and had become an atheist. But while at Magdalen College he joined a group of writers that had formed a club that called themselves The Inklings. Among this group of deep thinkers was J. R. R. Tolkien (author of *The Lord Of The Rings*). Tolkien caused Lewis to rethink his position on God and he soon became a believer when he was 32 years old. For the next 30 years he would impact the world by his prolific writings on God and the Bible, using logic to cause doubters to question their rejection of faith.

Lewis wrote powerful thought-provoking books like *The Problem of Pain* (1940), *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *The Abolition of Man* (1943), *The Great Divorce* (1945), *Miracles* (1947), *Mere Christianity* (1952), *Till We Have Faces* (1956), *The Four Loves* (1960), and *A Grief Observed* (1961). Added to these were his fictional series on *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949-1954) and *The Space Trilogy* (1938-1945).

But it was in his autobiographical work *Surprised By Joy* (1955) that I draw my title and the purpose of this article. The book is about his search for true joy in which he moves from his rejection of God (atheism) to his belief in God (theism), then from there to his finding Jesus Christ (Christianity). He describes his quest for meaningful joy by saying it is like a signpost to those lost in the woods. From fear of being lost they suddenly see this sign that points them in the right direction. Along the way they see other signs showing they are getting closer and closer to their home until finally they are safe and secure. Searching for God and for His joy is like that ecstatic feeling of being lost, then suddenly, although slowly but surely, finding your way home.

In his quest to find meaning to his life (i.e. joy), he describes his conversion in a very unique way. I’ll let him tell the story, then I will turn to scripture to show how another man came to Christ almost kicking and screaming.

Mr. Lewis tells us how he became a most reluctant convert.

# “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.”

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“The most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”

Would not Paul have said something similar? Perhaps, “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all Israel.” I’m talking about his three days of blindness and fasting on Straight Street in Damascus at the house of Judas after the Lord had appeared to him on his journey to destroy Christians (read Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18). During those dark days of fear and trembling, being told by the Lord Himself, “*I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles to whom I now send you*…” (Ac. 26:17-18), his world had been turned upside down and inside out.

He had gone from the hunter to the hunted, from persecutor to persecuted, from rising star to outcast fugitive. Everything he had ever believed in was now to be cast aside as “*loss for Christ*” and as “*rubbish*” (Phil. 3:7-8). During those lonely and terrifying 72 hours awaiting trial, feeling like he was sitting on Death Row, he had to swallow his pride. Think of what he probably was saying to himself:

“I have been wrong all of my life! Everything I have believed in was a lie! My mentor Gamaliel was deceived! My Pharisee colleagues were all false teachers and hypocrites! My father was wrong! I am now told I must suffer from my Jewish friends and spend my life teaching those Gentiles that I have thought were worse than lepers!”

Those three days of soul-searching surely made Paul a most reluctant convert. But, like C. S. Lewis, once committed he became “surprised by joy.” From the moment he received his sight and arose and was baptized to wash away his sins (Ac. 22:16), he never looked back over the next thirty years. He put behind him his ignorant past and “*reaching forward … I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:12-14).

Perhaps that is your story too. It is hard, so very hard, to let go of the past. Whether that is your religious past from what your parents taught you, or your worldly past that draws you to its pleasures of sin, it takes a gut-wrenching decision to cast your past behind you and move into uncharted territory as you walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). But, you too will be “surprised by joy” as you daily discover God’s grace as His newborn child.

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