

KEN BOA-The Great Divorce-part 1

“Father we thank you that you have called us to know you and we ask that you clarify our thoughts as we study this book and seek to understand principles that are timeless and relevant for our lives. We ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.” As you know from this material, the great books that we are going to be looking at, and we are going to be looking at six books but the first of these is by C.S. Lewis. I always like to start with Lewis because he is so easy to read and so attractive to a wide readership for some very good reasons that I am going to mention in just a moment. There is an irony about my doing this. You can see that we have quite a range of books and that they have, in various surveys, been selected as some of the most influential books that Christian leaders have read; including *Paradise Lost*, *Confessions*, Pascal’s *Pensee*, *Pilgrim’s Progress* and we are even going to try and summarize *The Brothers Karamatsov* in one hour. So, these are very big challenges. What I enjoy doing is synthesizing, taking the pieces and putting them together and so my job is to synthesize the essence of this material and to try and translate it and make it accessible for us and to try and draw as well some personal and practical implications, some theological implications by looking at this great literature which has been prompted by, and influenced by, a Christian worldview. Wherever one is, at least we can see how this vision of reality has shaped some of the great literature we are exposed to. As we consider this, then, it is ironic to me

because I am one of these people who managed, in grade school, to never read any books. I successfully avoided reading books. When I had to do a book review, if *Classics Illustrated* had it I would read that and who's to know if you ever read the book? I knew the plot. Or, I would watch the movie. I could get the basic plot from that as well. Then, that would be my book report. Here, then, is a person who is paying his dues. What I am now doing is realizing that some of the best literature we are exposed to in life comes to us at a time when we are not ready to receive it. When you are in high school and college you don't have the years of experience needed to really appreciate and embrace this material. The time we ought to be reading this literature is the time we stop reading it altogether; at least reading this literature. Isn't that true? People generally get away from the classics they were forced to read when they were younger and then when they are ready for it they are not eager to be exposed to it again. So, my challenge is to you, and by the way, I am drawing the assumption that you have not read these books. Am I being realistic here? Some of you have read these books or at least some of them but I am going to be assuming that you haven't been exposed to them and my hope here is that I can kind of tantalize you by giving you a kind of a taste for some of these and maybe encourage you to expose yourself to this material. If you have read it, hopefully it will be a reminder in the tying together of the various themes. The

approach I will try to take with each of these books is simple. First, I will try and say a quick word about the author. Secondly, I will say a word about the theme and the development of the book. Third, what I like to do is pull out some of my favorite passages and quotations and let the work speak for itself and to illustrate that and make some comments on that as well. Finally, at the end, I would like to draw some applications or implications for our lives. I believe this literature really gives us timeless insights on truth. I came across a remarkable article called *Myth Matters* and it is in the April 23, 2001 issue of *Christianity Today* and it is written by Lewis Marcos. Marcos argues that what we need to do in our time is to have a more incarnational view of art. One that takes literature seriously. And He argues that C.S. Lewis had a genius way of combining both logic and also imagination. He had a profound ability to take a rigorous way of presenting truth but also stimulating our senses and giving us a childlike wonder and awe. Marcos says, “Unlike so many contemporary Christian academics who passively accept the existing assumptions upon which their discipline is based and then meekly ask that God’s name be mentioned now and then, Lewis went on the offensive and challenged the assumptions themselves. The pure Lewis tempered his logic with a love for beauty and wonder and magic. His conversion to Christ not only freed his mind from the bonds of a narrow stoicism, it freed his heart to fully embrace his earlier passion for mythology.” I think we have this concept that modernism, and I

agree with Marcos on this point when he says, “Modernism has killed nature and soured the universe and the Church has done nothing to restore the cosmos to life”. Here is an irony; in the middle ages Christians held a view of the universe as a place teeming with life and meaning and purpose. That image has been discarded and, in fact, it is the name of one of Lewis’ academic books, *The Discarded Image*. He talks about this image that somehow tied the cosmos together. Actually, it animates much of Lewis’ own writing and also his fiction. If you read his space trilogy or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, you get that image of the way it was once seen in a coherent and comprehensive way of seeing that the universe is teeming, as it were, with life and possibility and the idea of seeing here that God, because of the incarnation, takes the material cosmos and he embraces in his fiction and his non-fiction a way seeing and stimulating our imagination. One of Lewis’ more important critiques of modernism in this article involved this questioning of the modernist’s assumption that higher things are always copies of lower things. For example, Marxism’s claim that ideology merely reflects underlying economic forces; Darwin’s belief that more complex life forms, like human beings, evolve from lower, less complex life forms and so forth; Freud’s insistence that love and charity are but a sublimation of lust, that sort of a thing. Lewis called this ‘nothing-buttery’ and it was the idea that what we see as so high is ‘nothing-but’, and it is something that just comes from below. So, Lewis challenges that. Much of Lewis’

creative and apologetic energy, both in his fiction and non-fiction, is devoted to demonstrating that lower things are, in fact, copies of higher things. Heaven is the real place and our world is a mere shadow. Hence the word 'shadowland'. We dwell in the 'shadowland' and our greatest moments of beauty, our greatest moments in relationships, our greatest experiences of esthetic wonder or of adventure, are merely hints and as Lewis Ellsworth says, "Patches of God light on the woodlands of our experience." They are hints of home but we are not home yet. Lewis talks about this idea of longing and in his *Surprised by Joy* and some of his other material this desire for something, that if you try and find out what it is that you desire you can't quite grab it. Have you ever had a longing for something and you can't quite enter into it? You are outdoors, for example, and you see something so exquisite that you want to become a part of it but somehow it always eludes your grasp? That is a hint of something that you are still realizing you can not embrace because we are not home yet. But, one day we will, in fact, enter in and he says, in *The Weight of Glory*, "The door we have been knocking on all our lives will open at last." He takes fiction seriously and this article goes on to talk about how he uses irony and paradox and ambiguity as metaphors and symbols of the existence and reality of transcendent truths. Really, Lewis had a way of smuggling Christian energies in the back door. Lots and lots of people have read

The Chronicles of Narnia without ever knowing it is about Jesus. Many people have done that. That is the power of it. There is something powerful about that story but they are clueless as to what it is really about and yet there is a hint. There is much of Tolkein as well that points to a Christian foundation. *Deep Myth* speaks deeply to the heart and in this post modern era, where people have become more cynical and skeptical than ever before, we need story, we need narrative, we need something to stimulate our imagination. A word about Lewis, himself and I will be using some illustrations from Kate Lundgren's book *C.S. Lewis: Mere Christian*, which has some helpful insights. She calls him a man of "Mirth, girth and humility." That is a good summary. He was a merry kind of a man. "He had a marvelous and magical childhood for nine years until his mother died of cancer. During that time in Ireland, in County Down, in Northern Ireland, Clive Lewis and his older brother, Warren, spent an extraordinary amount of time outdoors, drawing, riding, yearning for the distant hills on the horizon." But, after his mother died when he was nine they were sent off to a nightmarish boarding school in England. It was one of the worst things they could ever imagine. Warren Lewis, his brother, later described this experience, "With his uncanny flair for making the wrong decision, my father had given us helpless children into the hands of a madman." Basically, they were in a crazy school and in spite of all their protestations, their father was convinced they were at a great institution. He never

figured it out. While Lewis, later on, entered a preparatory school and began to dabble in occultism, he decided he was an atheist after all. He begins to form certain habits and one was his life long habit of smoking which he never managed to kick. Later he went another school, Malvern College. He had a tremendously powerful inner-imaginative life, though he hated the schools themselves. He hated being forced into sports and so forth and he loved the world of the imagination. The library was his place of escape. He was in love with poetry and romance and Norse mythology and Celtic and Greek mythology as well. He later wondered if his adoration of false gods in whom he did not believe was the true God's way of developing in him a keen capacity for worship. Lewis always recognized the value of myth. He felt they were on to something, but for him the difference was, in Christianity, it really happened. Myth and history became one with the incarnation. Tolkein called it the 'eu-catastrophy'. A 'eu-catastrophy', "A catastrophic eruption into human history for good". That is what the incarnation was, the decisive revelation of God in His manifest glory. Well, when the First World War broke out, Lewis was sent to study with an atheistic tutor, an elderly Scotsman by the name of Kilpatrick, who Lewis finally called the 'great knock', and the 'great knock' would knock everything Lewis believe in or said. He would challenge him constantly and had a love for argument and challenged Lewis to think with tremendous intellectual vigor. He wouldn't allow any sloppy thought. This marked

Lewis for life because he writes with rigor and precision, and that is one of the beauties of his work, but at the same time he still writes with imagination. During those years he was in Surrey, in this lively environment, he would also buy a number of books, and one of the books he happened to buy was a copy of *Fantasies*, by George MacDonald, which, he said, baptized his imagination. This Christian fantasy and MacDonald had a profound impact on Lewis' thinking and you will see how he uses him again and again. We will see this in the story we will be discussing tonight. We will see that MacDonald becomes Lewis' guide in this bizarre land that Lewis creates. So, you have this marvelous combination of intellectual rigor and marvelous imagination. He was also influenced in these years by G.K. Chesterton, especially after the war. Lewis was in France and suffered the horrors and drama of that war. One of his buddies, Paddy Moore, a fellow soldier, died and they had a covenant that if one of them died the other would take care of the mother. Lewis inherited Mrs. Moore. He inherited Mrs. Moore from the end of the war until 1951. She lived with him and regarded Lewis as a rather good servant. Basically, she got more and more crotchety as the years went by. The amazing thing is that Lewis kept his promise. It was a personal discipline for him to be a true servant in this regard. I see a tremendous and profound humility all during his career, famous as he was. In his earlier years he also came across another Christian writer, G.K. Chesterton. And Chesterton, though he disagreed

with his beliefs, he was conquered by his writing, because Chesterton is an engaging writer. Now, I don't know if you have read much of his work but he is very, very engaging. Listen to George McDonald: "Chesterton turned out to be one of the greatest influences on Lewis' life" and as Lewis put it, "I didn't think that a man who wishes to be a sound atheist could be too careful in his reading." In fact, as Lewis was at Oxford taking courses as a student at University College and later was offered a position as a lecturer, he switched from philosophy, from materialism, to absolute idealism; he began to believe that there had to be a mind involved, but it was a personal mind that was involved. Other friends of his, during discussions, forced him to think about these processes but he didn't want this mind to be God. That was the last thing he wanted because that was too scary. If God was personal then he has to answer to him and, as he put it, "It would never come down here and make a nuisance of itself. There was nothing to fear and, better yet, nothing to obey." In any case, there is a famous bus ride, where Lewis got the impression he was shutting something out and he either had to open up or close it out forever. He opened it up; opened to the possibility that this impersonal thing is really a person who is pursuing him. And, Lewis opened up to that possibility and to that person. But, Lewis' conversion did not take place until 1929. His account of his conversion is often quoted. "You might picture me, alone in that room at

Magdalene, night after night,” and Magdalene was where he was teaching, “for whenever my mind lifted from my work, there was the steady, unrelenting approach of him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet.” He wasn’t looking for God. He was trying to avoid God’s claim on his life. “That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me in the trinity,” which is the Spring, “term of 1929 and I gave in and admitted that God was God, knelt and prayed, perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.” As he puts it, he “went kicking and screaming into the kingdom.” But, that still wasn’t his full conversion. That didn’t happen until 1931 because he still believed that Jesus was not God and one of the reasons for that was because he thought the incarnation would bring God nearer in yet another new way. It was two Christian friends, J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dison who influenced him in this final stage of his conversion. So, at the age of 33, in 1931, on a sunny morning as he was riding to the zoo in the side car of his brother Warren’s motorcycle, and as he puts it in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, “When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did.” Birds and blue bells and wallabies hopping all around and he was a new man. A pattern emerges in his life over the next several years and it was a rather quiet and orderly and steady kind of life. He enjoyed certain things. His main pleasures were long walks in the country and very intellectual conversations with his good friends. That is what he loved and that was

his passion, to be on country walks and to share a good evening with beloved friends in front of a crackling fireplace with some nice Port. That is where he would find that he would enjoy his life. He was becoming famous by the time his first book of prose, *Pilgrim's Regress* was published. This was followed later with very substantial works: *The Allegory of Love*, a marvelous book to read and *The Screwtape Letters*, published in 1942, is what put him on the cover of Time magazine. Really, he never liked that book very much. He hated the process of writing it. He said it was easy to write but he hated doing it. He didn't want to be known simply as the author of *The Screwtape Letters*. It wasn't his favorite book. Some of his favorite books would include Parlandra and his most favorite would be *Until We have Faces*, which is perhaps the most difficult of his fiction to really grasp. It requires some time. If our time in this series goes well I would like to do more books and maybe I will do that one. Anyway, Mrs. Moore, when she died in 1951, Lewis wrote to a friend, "Many things without and many things within are marvelously well at present." It was a burden that was lifted and during that time, in the early 50's, was when he was writing his magical stories about Narnia. It was a marvelous time in his life as well and he had a beautiful new combination of the rigorous literature, 16th century literature, he was a contributor to the Oxford History of English Literature. He was a medievalist and contributed to medieval literature. He was able to deal with all that but he was also a popularizer. A lot of

his peers at Oxford resented his popularity and thereby refused to give him his much-deserved professorship. As a result, it was not until 1954 that finally Cambridge University, that ‘other school’, offered him a full professorship. Of course, then Oxford made him the same offer but it was too late and I respect Lewis’ consistency here. So, what he did was, he kept his home in the Kilns, which was in Headington Quarry and he would take the train on the weekends to come home and visit his brother Warren. In fact, he kept that home for over thirty years and the house has now been restored to the way it originally was and is open to visitors. He gave away a lot of money. In spite of his popularity, it never went to his head. He gave two-thirds of his royalties away. And, the more famous he became the more voluminous was his letter writing. He had physical problems but he faithfully wrote letters. In fact, a whole book was created from the one correspondence he maintained, *Letters to an American Lady*. He was a remarkable individual who had brilliance combined with humility. I might mention, however, had he not been in the war we may have never heard of him at all. It turns out that he was allowed, as a veteran, when he went to Oxford, to waive the math exams. He had miserably failed them before he went to France. So, quite possibly, he would have never entered Oxford without that waiver. 1954, then, was another important year and it was the time He met Joy Gresham. She was an American Jew by birth, who was married to a communist. Lewis’ writings influenced Gresham

and she became a Christian. Sadly, however, Joy's husband was unfaithful to her and she brought the two children over to England and they lived as neighbors to Lewis and he graciously, and secretly, married her in a civil ceremony so that, in 1956, she would be able to stay and live in England. He never even told his dearest friends that he had done this. However, things changed and what he was doing to help her out later turned into love and in 1957, when Joy was diagnosed with cancer and in a hospital ward, a Priest married the two of them in a Christian ceremony at her bedside. There must have been some powerful prayers because her cancer went into remission long enough for them to enjoy three years together. It was a joy for them both and they even went off to Greece together. She sadly passed away and he, then, reflects on his own pain and grief. Earlier he had written a book called *The Problem of Pain* which was dealing with intellectual side of it in particular; now he writes his own personal experience with pain, called *A Grief Observed*, which he had written anonymously at first, because in it he wrestles with God. He doesn't abandon his faith, of course, but he wrestles, like Job and like the Psalmists, with God, because of the emotion. But, he knew this was going to happen and yet the pain was more than he thought he could endure. Sadly, as well, after her death in 1960, his own health was failing. Due to an enlarged prostate, which then affected his kidneys, which then affected his heart, he was deteriorating in his health and ultimately he passed away, right after having

afternoon tea, on the 22nd of November, 1963, which should be a date that many of you will remember. He died just a few hours before John F. Kennedy and also, a third person, Aldous Huxley, passed away on that same day. That prompted, by the way, a writer, Peter Kreeft, to write a marvelous book, *Between Heaven and Hell*, in which he imagines a dialog going on between these three people who are all in a waiting room between heaven and hell. Lewis represents the Chris-theist, Kennedy represents the humanist and Huxley basically represents a transcendentalist, more of an eastern pantheist. He takes those three worldviews and he weaves them together in a marvelous way. As we go into this book, *The Great Divorce*, I want to make some comments about the basic theme and structure. Lewis had the idea for the book back in 1931 when he came across the writings of Jeremy Taylor, a 14th century Anglican divine, and also the 4th century poet and hymn writer, Prudentius. This is mentioned in the book and we see it being alluded to when he mentions something called the ‘refrigerarium’ in chapter 10. George McDonald, by the way, becomes his guide, as we will see in just a moment, that he brings this up, “What is this refrigerarium that Taylor and Prudentius talk about?” It is this concept about the damned having a holiday, some kind of rest for a moment of time, when they can go and visit and in this case, the idea that Lewis got was having a bus from heaven come down to hell and it picks up passengers who want

on to go and check out heaven and see if they want in or not. Lewis is going to be demonstrating, and stresses over and over again, don't take this literally; don't suppose that I am really saying it is this way. He is drawing some important principles through this genre of fiction. Actually, prior to this work there were some poems that appeared in his other works and also in *Pilgrim's Regress* that stress three key points: (1) You can not fix a point beyond which a man is able to repent, but there will be such a point somewhere. He talks about a point, and none of us know where, where a man reaches that 'point of no return', where a choice is made; toward God or away from God. A rather shuddering thought. By the way, I have found Walter Hooper's book, *C.S. Lewis: Companion and Guide* to be a marvelous text that gives us some background to Lewis' writings. Point (2) is this: even God can not over rule free will because it is meaningless to talk of a man doing freely what a man has freely made impossible for himself. In his problem with pain, for example, dealing with this whole issue of why hasn't God met everyone in heaven and the question he raises is "With, or against their will?" Suppose a person has been seeking to avoid God all their Life? What makes you suppose they will enjoy His presence then? Do you see the concept here? We are either moving toward or away from God. Actually, heaven or hell becomes the ultimate destiny that you are choosing, in effect, by moving toward or away from God. And, the third point is this word 'fissiparous'. You hear the word fission and

what it is talking about is the breaking up of something. The idea is that it has a way of dividing and multiplying. It is fissiparous and can never, in a thousand eternities, find a way to arrest its own reproduction. Hell, then, was created as a tourniquet to stop the lost soul's downward progression. Now, as we go into the book itself, it begins with a preface that you don't want to overlook. "Blake wrote of the marriage of Heaven and Hell. I have written of their divorce." That is where he gets the term, 'the great divorce'. Blake had the claim that we could, somehow, turn an 'either-or' into a 'both-and' or we could have our cake and eat it, too.

Lewis is saying that such a claim would be a mistake. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable 'either-or'; if you have enough patience there is time enough and you can get them both. Lewis says this is a disastrous error. He says that, "The ripening of good and evil has a way of moving us toward one or the other and that good continues to ripen and that evil continues to ripen as well." And, he says, "Evil can be undone but it can not be developed into good. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound bit by bit. With backward mutters of disappearing power or else not." It is not an 'either-or'. "If you insist on keeping hell, or even earth, we shall not see heaven. If we select heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and intimate souvenirs of hell." He is saying we are heading one way or another. As he says, "I believe, to be sure, that any man," and we are still in the preface, "who reaches heaven will find

that what he abandoned, even if he poked out his right eye, was precisely nothing, that the kernel of what he was seeking, even in his most depraved wishes, will be there, beyond his expectation, waiting for him in the high countries.” He is saying that what we really long for in our deep heart of hearts will be offered. Now, this is an important issue. “Earth, I think in the end, will not be found by anyone to be a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of heaven, will turn out to be, all along, only a region in hell.” Do you catch that idea? Heaven and hell work retroactively. They work backwards. Time works backwards in a real sense, so now we are in soul-forming process. You see the idea? We are forming something now, then, that will become fully realized in the next life. He says, “Earth, if put second to heaven, will have been, from the beginning, a part of heaven itself.” Having said those things, he is making a strong emphasis here that, look, I have a moral but it is all imaginative; not even a guess or a speculation of what might really awake us. He is not saying, literally, that a bus is coming from heaven. Now, in hell, it is always raining and there is always an evening twilight and the folks who go down there have a way of disliking each other, are constantly quarreling and moving further and further away from each other. By now, people have been there for a few centuries are already light years away from each other. The idea that you are going to run into a Napoleon, or someone like that, is not a really

likely possibility because these historical characters, Julius Caesar, Ghengis Khan, you are not going to run across these folks. They are light years away by this time. In fact, nobody lives together. The other thing is they have no needs. You want a house; the house is there. Of course, it rains in it and it is kind of gray-like. You have what you need but it is not substantive. In fact, you are kind of a shadowy figure. You can see through people; there is no substance. He stresses this continually; there is no substance to these people. He will contrast this with the solid people of heaven and the idea here is that these folks even fight with each other while getting on the bus. No one wants to stay in line and they can't figure out why they are even going up there; perhaps it is their little 'refigerarium', their little holiday, and they are going to go off and see what things are like. See if they will like the other country or not. You will discover in the book, and here is the bottom line, that virtually all of them decide to head back to hell because they really do not like what they see. They are not even in heaven, they are only on the outskirts and the sun has not yet risen. Nowhere in hell is the sun fully dark. It is a twilight. In fact, there is a belief here, an educated claim here, by an apostolic bishop, who makes this claim on the bus as they are on the way up. He makes this claim because one of them says, "You mean this evening is really going to turn into a night in the end?" "No," he says, "that is nonsense and there is not a shred of evidence that this twilight is going to turn into a night. There has been a revolution

of opinion on that in educated circles and I am surprised you haven't heard of it. All the nightmare fantasies of our ancestors have been swept away and what we see now in this subdued and delicate half-light is the promise of a dawn." Doesn't that sound familiar? The idea of something that sounds good but is actually a distortion of what is right before our eyes. It turns out, and the word get out, that it might become night after all. As we see, going into the larger space of heaven, when they go on, it is a scary place and much bigger than they expected. They feel naked and very, very insubstantial. In fact, they can't even pick up a blade of grass or a leaf from the ground. They are too heavy and, in fact, it hurts to walk on the grass because it pierces their feet. Everything is so substantial, in comparison with their insubstantiality, that it is overwhelming to be there; it is frightening and a different sort of place than they had ever guessed before. What we see here now are a series of characters who come along and they illustrate the idea that people who do not choose God will not will the conditions in order to know Him and enjoy the bliss of heaven. They are even given offers by people that they formerly knew. What happens here is that these bright people, substantial people, these solid people will come, even though they don't need to do so, they are going to stop going up the mountain, heading toward it, and come back and try to persuade people that the formerly knew, relatives, friends, that you need to come with us. It will hurt at first. Yes, it will hurt if you move in this direction but each step will

hurt a little less than the one before. You see the idea? You are going to move in a progression but the progression is the movement away from pride and arrogance, the idea that you can have it your way. You will discover that every one of these characters has an idea, a fixed idea, of the way things ought to be and if God doesn't want to co-operate with my idea then I don't want anything to do with Him. We will see this come from several directions, again highlighting the theme that people really elect to move toward or away from God and there is this mystery of freedom that has been to each of these creatures. Now, in the fourth chapter, we see a marvelous illustration of pride and works. There is a fellow who is shocked to see there is somebody who was a murderer in heaven. He is with a former co-worker at this time and looking stunned he demands, "What are you doing here? If anyone deserves to be here I deserve to be here." Basically, he is saying, "I've been straight all my life. I don't say I was a religious man and I don't say I didn't have my faults. Far from it. But I did my best by everybody all my life, see? That's the sort of chap I was. I never had anything that wasn't mine by rights." So, he talks about his rights. He demands his rights. This is what he asks for. "I'm just asking for nothing but my rights. You may think you can put me down because you dress up like that but you weren't when you worked under me. Well, I'm only a poor man. I've got my rights, same as you, see?" And then the spirit, the man who worked for him, says, "Oh, its not so bad as that. I haven't got my rights, or I

should not be here. You will not get yours either. You will get something far better.” Never fear and don’t ask for rights. I often teach people never ask God for justice. ‘I want what is coming to me and I want it now’. Justice is getting what you deserve. Don’t ever ask for that. Ask for mercy and grace. That is what you want to ask for. “I’m not asking for anybody’s bleeding charity,” he says. His friend says, “Everything for the asking is here and nothing can be bought.” Unconvinced, the man says, “I done my best,” but his friend says, “You can never do it like that. Your feet will never grow hard enough to walk on our grass that way, if you try it on your own works. You will get tired before you get to the mountains. And, by the way it isn’t exactly true.” As mirth dances in his eyes as he says it. “What wasn’t true?” “You weren’t a decent man and you didn’t do your best. None of us were and none of us did but it doesn’t matter, there is no need to go into that now.” You see the idea here? This inflated view of ourselves is actually the very thing that keeps us from God. “You have the cheek to tell me I wasn’t a decent chap?” “Of course, but must I go into all that? I’ll tell you one thing, murdering old Jack wasn’t the worst thing I did. That was work of the moment and I was half-mad when I did it but I murdered you in my heart deliberately for years. I used to lie awake nights thinking what I would do to you if I ever got the chance. That is why I am here, to ask you for forgiveness and invite you with me.” The other fellow rejects that. He says, “This is a bloody clique, that

is all it is. Tell them I'm not coming. I'd rather be damned than come along with you. I've got my rights, see. I don't need to go sniveling along tied to your apron strings." So, he goes his own way. It is an illustration of somebody who will not let loose of his false pride and his false self enough to allow the grace of humility to break through and thus to know God. There is no one who comes to him by that path. I want to say a few words about the story of the apostolic bishop. He felt he was heroic for denying the basic tenets of the faith. He says, "My views were honest and heroic. I asserted them fearlessly. When the doctrine of the resurrection ceased to commend itself to the critical faculties that God had given me, I openly rejected it. I preached my own sermon, I defied every chapter, I took my own risk." His guide then tells him this, "What risk? What was it all likely to come to except more popularity and more sales for your books?" The bishop says, "This is unkind of you. What are you suggesting?" "Friend, I am not suggesting anything at all. See, I know now. Let us be frank. Our opinions were not honestly come by. We found ourselves in contact with a certain current of ideas and we embraced it because it seemed modern and successful. In college, you know we just started automatically writing essays that got good marks and won applause. In our whole lives did we honestly face, in solitude, the one question from which it all turned? After all, the supernatural might not, in fact, occur. When did we put up one moment's real resistance to the loss of our faith?" We didn't want the other to be

true. We were afraid of crude salvationism and afraid of ridicule and afraid, above all, of real spiritual fear and hope. That rather cuts true, I would say, because you see the point here is that we know nothing of religion here as puts it to him. The fellow decides not to go in. It was an offense to his taste, you see, and it wasn't as he wanted to think of it. He had written a paper on if Jesus had lived longer then his more mature thoughts would have been much better. He decides to go back and, anyway, he has a little theological society back there in hell. They will discuss ideas there and so he leaves. In the next chapter there is a beautiful vignette about avarice and the bottom line is that the fellow there is hoping he can collect a bag of the golden apples that have fallen around him. But he can't pick them up because they are too heavy. So he tries to get just two and that doesn't work and then he thinks he can get just one, and he looks for the smallest apple he can find and with total agony he strains and grunts but gets nowhere. As Lewis tells us, "He was struggling from his hurts and lame and bent double and yet even so, inch by inch, still availing himself of every scrap of cover, he set on the Via Dellarosa, to the bus, carrying his torture." He thought he could take this piece of gold back with him to hell. "Fool, put it down," said a great voice, a thunderous voice yet liquid voice. "With appalling certainty I knew the waterfall itself was speaking." He talks about, "Fool, put it down, you can not take it with you. There is not room for it in hell. Stay here and learn to eat such apples." Instead, he elects not to do so and he

goes to the bus. There is a chapter about a cynic, a rather hard-bitten ghost, and there is a chapter on vanity. There is a character who was once a woman and she doesn't like the fact that people can see through her. She is trying to put up a good show and she is told by a friend she meets, who is one of the solid ones, "That will soon be alright. You are going in the wrong direction. It is back there, toward the mountains. You need to go, but you can lean on me all the way. I can not carry you but after awhile it will hurt less and less with every step and you will become more substantial as you move through." She is worried that people will see her and says, "But I would rather die." You have died already. There is no good trying to go back to that." "Oh, I wish I had never been born. What are we born for?" "Infinite happiness," said the spirit. "Step out into it at any moment." "But, I tell you, they will see me!" An hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it. Don't you remember that there were things too hot to touch with your finger but you could drink them all right? Shame is like that if you accept it and drink the cup to the bottom and find it very nourishing." Again, the idea of swallowing your pride becomes the key. There is an uncertain outcome at the end of this one. In chapter nine we run into the guide. It is, in fact, George McDonald. McDonald is to Lewis what Virgil was to Dante. He provides him a guide into the next world as it were and makes some very significant statements. Let me just read a couple of these. "They say of some temporal suffering," this is an important argument, "no

future bliss can make up for temporal suffering.” Have you heard that argument? It is a common argument. The problem of pain is a very real issue in people’s thoughts. “Not knowing that heaven, once attained, works backwards and will turn even that agony into a glory.” “Of some sinful pleasure they say ‘let me but have this and I will take the consequence’.” Ever been tempted to make such a simple statement? “Little deeming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin. Both processes begin before death. The good man’s past begin to change and his forgiven sins and sorrows take on the quality of heaven. The bad man’s past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness. That is why, at the end of all things, when the sun rises here and the twilight turns to blackness down there, the blessed will say we have never lived anywhere except in heaven and the lost always in hell and both will speak truly.” That is a profound idea about you choose earth above heaven and you miss out on the joys of that and you choose to move away from the living God and you actually turn earth into a hell. Choose heaven above earth, choose God, and you will discover, when you are in his presence, that it all worked backwards and even your worst pain, your worst moment, was, in fact, used redemptively by God to prepare your soul in the formation process to be with Him and to endure his presence. Do you see the concept here? You will realize, then, that there was no evil that could destroy God’s purposes for your life. We move on to another story.

Let me read one comment here that I think is important. “There are only two kinds of people in the end,” and, this is where his famous statement comes from, “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 and without that self-choice there could be no hell. “The soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will never miss it. Those who seek, find. Those who knock, it is opened.” There is this idea of joy that God prepares for those who wish to know Him. So, McDonald, as Lewis’ guide, instructs him in these things. There is a story about an artist who is so focused on his art that it really becomes an extension of his ego. He talks about the fact that instead of enjoying the creation for itself, they become so self-conscious that they sink lower and lower and it doesn’t stop at being interested in paint, they sink lower and become interested in their own personalities and then nothing but of their own reputations. It is an interesting thing that art was originally done anonymously. Later on, people began to make their reputations paying on that and then they tried to become original just for originality’s sake and ‘art for art’s sake’ became an end rather than for God’s sake and it lost its real vision and thus the attempt to become original led to a lot of bad art. The idea is that he wants them to be distinguished people here and he wants to paint in heaven and he wants to do original things and he wants to be famous there. He’s told that “Nobody is famous

here. There is nobody distinguished here. Don't you understand? The glory flows into everyone and back from every one like light in mirrors. The light is the thing." He then finds out he has been forgotten on earth and he is very disturbed by this and he wants to go back and do something about it right away. It turned out that his particular form of art is no longer popular. There is the story of a controlling manipulator in chapter ten and I won't go into that except to say it is about a woman who wants her husband back. He is heaven and she is in hell and all she ever did was try to order him and manipulate him and choose his friends and at the end of that chapter she says, "He is not fit to be on his own. Put me in charge of him. He wants firm handling. I know him better than you do. Please, I am so miserable. I must have some one to do things to. It is simply frightful down there." In the end you get the feeling she's going to try and persuade them to let him come back down with her because she's not going up there. That is another form of distorted love. There is obsession and idolatry in chapter 11. Here is a woman who lost her child and all she can think about is wanting to be in heaven solely to be with her child, not to know God. Interesting mindset. "Pam, do think," her friend tells her, one of the solid people, again, who was a friend of hers and is now speaking to her here, "Don't you see that you are not beginning at all? As long as you are in that state of mind you are treating God only as a means to Michael. But,

the whole thickening treatment consists in learning to want God for His own sake.”

You see the idea? She can not thicken until she wishes to know Him. “He wanted you to love Michael as He understands love. You can not love a fellow creature fully until you love God.” That is a very profound observation. Otherwise, human loves will be distorted into manipulative loves. You can not truly love a person well until you truly love God more. That is the idea here. So, this love becomes a false god and natural affection becomes distorted. In fact, let me just read this little section. “Something in natural affection which will lead to love into eternal love more easily than natural appetite could be led on. But, there is also something in it which makes it easier to stop at natural love or mistake it for the heavenly. Grass is mistaken for gold more easily than clay is. It finally refuses conversion and its corruption will be worse than the corruption of what you call the lower passions.”

A stronger angel, when it falls, becomes a fiercer devil. There is a man who has a problem with lust in the next chapter. It is represented by a red lizard on his shoulder and it is constantly speaking to him. “I saw coming toward us a ghost who carried something on his shoulder and like all the ghosts he was insubstantial but he differed from one another as spokes differ.” He talks about how this lizard was touching his tail and constantly speaking to him. The ghost does not want the angel to interfere because he is afraid the angel will actually mess things up. “Yes,

I am off,” says the ghost, “Thanks for your hospitality but there is no good here. I told this little chap,” speaking of the lizard, “that he would have to be quiet if he came and he insisted on doing it. Of course, this stuff is beautiful, but he won’t stop and I will just have to go home.” The angel asked, “Would you like me to make him quiet?” “Of course I would,” said the ghost. “Then I will kill him,” said the angel. “Oh, no, no, keep away,” said the ghost, retreating quickly. “Don’t you want him killed?” “You didn’t say anything about killing him at first. I didn’t mean to bother you with anything so drastic as that.” It is the only way,” said the angel, whose very hands were now close to the lizard. “Shall I kill it?” “Well, that is a further question. I am quite open to consider it but it is important issue, isn’t it. For the moment, I was only thinking about silencing it because it is so damned embarrassing.” May I kill it?” “There is time to discuss that later.” There is no time, may I kill it?” “No, no, don’t bother. Sorry to be such a nuisance. Look, it has gone to sleep on its accord. I am sure it will be all right. Thank you, so much.”

“May I kill it?” Notice the repeated question, because the angel can not do something contrary to the man’s choice. That freedom can not be violated. “I just want to say there is not the slightest necessity for that. I shall be able to keep it order now. I think that gradual process would be far better than killing it.” The gradual process is of no use at all. “I will think over what you have said very

carefully. I would let you kill it now but, as a matter of fact, I'm not feeling so frightfully well today." He goes on to talk about this moment containing all moments and I won't go into the whole story, but, "I can not kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?" Then, the lizard is onto it and says, "He really means it. He can do what he says. You know, I know I have given you some hard times. But, I have given you pleasure, too. You think you can really live but really nice dreams now. All sweet and fresh and almost innocent." "Have I
"But, suppose it does?" "Look, it would be better to be dead than to live with this the ghost, but he ends whimpering, "God help me, God help me." In the next burning one closed his crimson grip on the reptile, twisted it, and flung its broken Then Lewis' marvelous expression paints the picture of how that lizard becomes a white stallion and how he, himself, becomes like a resurrected person, "A glorious the sunrise." That is a marvelous picture of how even this sinner had power and potential. "What is a lizard compared to a stallion? Lust is a poor listless thing killed." What he is saying is that God has given us certain appetites, actually now what little bit of appetite we have is too much for us. The pleasures are really being mediated? Say, right now, a thousand times removed. We are not ready for brought out of that. "You must draw another lesson. If the risen body, even of love or friendship be?" You see the idea here? You see, the sin itself is not evil. It sycophant and he is like a parasite on his wife. She is in heaven and he needs to be

empty, I am love itself not lonely, strong, not weak. You should be the same. Come and see. We shall truly have a need for one another. We can begin to love truly.” That is another form of distorted love. “She needs me no more, no more,” he complained. What you have here is this little guy on the end of a chain with a little whimpering voice and he becomes smaller and smaller as he lets his false self become dominant. At the end of the day he tries to blackmail her. He somehow hopes to destroy her joy in heaven because of how he feels. You see the idea? As to this matter of blackmail, McDonald, the guide says, “What some people say on earth is that the final loss of one’s soul gives the lie to all the joy of those who are saved. You see that it does not.” “I see the way it ought to.” “That sounds very merciful, but see what lurks behind it.” “What? That the loveless and the self-imprisoned should be able to blackmail the universe? That unless they are happy on their own terms no one else can taste joy? That theirs should be the final power? That hell should be made to beat out heaven?” He says, “Son, it must be one way or the other. The day must come when joy prevails and all the makers of misery are no longer able to infect it. Or else, forever and ever, the makers of misery can destroy in others the happiness they reject for themselves. I know it has a grand sound, you’ll say, to accept no salvation which leaves one creature in the dark outside. But, watch that sophistry or you will make a dog in the manger the tyrant of the universe.” A dog in the manger was a term for a churlish person who would

use a thing but would not allow anyone else to use it. You see the idea here? What he is saying is that the damned can not blackmail the joy of heaven. Ultimately there will be no tear in our life and ultimately all things will be made well. At the end of the story suddenly everything changes. He realizes, now, that all those figures he has seen are like chessmen that have been moving to and fro on a board and he sees things differently. He says, "If you come to tell what you have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. Give no poor fool the pretext to think that you are claiming knowledge that no mortal knows." At the end he sees the light coming in the east. "It comes, it comes," they sing. "Sleepers awake, it comes, it comes, the rim of the sunrise that shoots time dead with golden arrows and puts to flight all phantasmal shapes." Screaming, I bared my eyes in the folds of my teacher's robe. "The morning, the morning," I cried, "I am caught by the morning and I am a ghost." But, it was too late and he realizes as he wakes up that he is in his room about three in the morning. The bottom line is that this marvelous story illustrates a couple of significant principles for us. It relates to the profound problem of evil and suffering. Basically, it tells us that we are people, as I said earlier, who are in a soul-forming process. We are moving toward God or away from God. The humility of moving toward God requires us to deny our own idea of where happiness lies and that we begin to embrace God's desire for our lives. The realization that we do not know what our best interest looks like, but He does. The

realization that God actually does want the best for us and that He alone can make it happen. The realization that we must humble ourselves under His mighty hand so that he can exalt us at the proper time. And that all the pain and sorrow that we now experience will be of nothing in comparison to a moment of the pleasure of his presence. Even ten minutes in heaven will more than make up for a whole lifetime of unhappiness. Yet, it will not be ten minutes. As I often say, your life is not determined by your past but by your unbounded future, where every day becomes better than the one before, every chapter is better than the one before and it gives us this realization that God has given us the immense dignity of choice. We are called to choose the way we are to go. “Choose you this day where you will go. I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. I desire that the wicked turn from their ways.” So, it is a concept here and those who know the Lord Jesus and move toward Him and to become a person who is preparing for that encounter we will all have when each person stands before the living God. Let us close in a prayer and next week we are going to look at John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. “Lord, we thank you for this time together and I ask that we would understand more about the glories that you have prepared for us and that we can hardly begin to grasp. Our minds are too weak. You have told us that which I have not seen or heard neither has entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him. Let us be the people who pursue the good that you desire for us. May we

seek your joy, the joy that can not be separated from you but can only be found in you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.”