Famous Conversions: C.S. Lewis Memory Verse: John 15:11

Aug. 27th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Psalm 16

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

 We are continuing to look at the conversion story of famous Christians throughout the history of the Christian church, and we have seen a good variety of people from different eras and different backgrounds. That is the wonderful things about conversion; it is a unique and personal experience with God. We must admit that conversion is a mystery, but even though we will never be able to understand how it is that an infinite and holy God reaches out to sinful humans, we can extract some common characteristics that attend any conversion. Hopefully you know these characteristics by now. They are: a vision of the truth, a conviction of sin, an experience of joy and the dawning of a new mission.

**SLIDE 2: CS Lewis**

 Today we are going to discuss the story of well-known writer C.S. Lewis. We are all familiar with Lewis in some sense. We all know of the “Chronicles of Narnia” series. Everyone understands it to be a fantasy story written with Christianity in mind. Everyone knows that Aslan the Lion is a stand-in for Jesus, and they actually are amazing books. If you have some time, I would encourage you to read them. They are also a wonderful option for parents or grandparents to read aloud to their kids. Lewis also wrote a trilogy the takes place in outer space. These stories explore the realities of sin and desire in our lives.

 But beyond fiction, Lewis is what might be called a “teaching evangelist.” He served as a professor at Oxford University teaching medieval and classical literature, but he never got up to speak in front of large congregations or preside over alter calls. In fact, if not for his writing, we may never have heard of C.S. Lewis at all. Because much like those who penned the very biblical texts we hold true today, Lewis’ greatest impact has been through the written word. Many have not only come to faith through the logical arguments he presents in his body of work, but even more have been shepherded to remain in the faith due to the impact of his books.

**SLIDE 3: BOOKS**

As a “teaching evangelist”, Lewis’s legacy of written works endures more so than most others. Apologetic works like “Mere Christianity”, “The Problem of Pain” or the “Abolition of Man” and his more imaginative writings “Till We have Faces” and “The Great Divorce” and the “Screwtape Letters” all point to a real God who expresses himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

 How many have read a book by Lewis? Some estimates have him as the best-selling Christian author of all time. 2 million copies of his works are sold every year. And if you have not read Lewis for yourself, chances are high that he is quoted or referenced in books you do read.

**SLIDE 4: Surprised By Joy**

While we could go on about his importance and impact, but I want to make sure we speak directly about his conversion. I will be referencing his autobiography of sorts entitled, “Surprised By Joy”. Now keep in mind, we have all along, talked about joy being an important part of conversion. But Lewis tracks what he calls the “stab of Joy”, throughout his life. Joy for Lewis is an “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.” In other words, joy is a longing that is somehow diminished if it is ever fulfilled. So let’s start with a little background.

 Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast Ireland in 1898. He had an older brother and his mother was the daughter of a clergyman. From the beginning Lewis, who went by Jack to his family, was a through and through introvert. He spent his childhood immersed in books and avoiding his neighbor who was of the same age. Some of this recluse behavior was due to the strange genetic fact that Lewis, and his brother both, lacked a second joint in his thumb. This made sports or any simple task nearly impossible to perform. This source of boyhood anxiety would serve to actually serve to instill in Lewis a bitterness toward the universe, a sense that this world is unfair. At the same time, his rare condition forced him to write. Jack and his brother spent much of their time creating new worlds and illustrating the creatures who lived there. One such creation was a world called Boxen and it was filled with, you guessed it, talking animals. This creative process had, for Lewis, the stab of joy.

 His opportunity for introspection and time to himself increased all the more when Lewis’ mother passed away when he was ten years old. Around this time he was shipped off to boarding school. In this time Lewis says he approached the idea of God, “without love, without awe, even without fear”. God was “a magician; and when He had done what was required of Him I suppose He would simply – well, go away.”

Lewis says that, with few exception, he was greatly blessed by the teachers he was able to study under throughout his education. Over the course of time, Lewis’ tenuous grip on faith began to loosen even more until eventually he gave it up and considered himself a full-blown agonistic. In fact, Lewis writes that he felt a relief. “From the tyrannous noon of revelation I passed into the cool evening of Higher Thought, where there was nothing to be obeyed, and nothing to be believed…”

**SLIDE 5: From the tyrannous noon of revelation I passed into the cool evening of Higher Thought, where there was nothing to be obeyed, and nothing to be believed…”**

This change in belief affected his behavior: “A new factor had entered my life: Vulgarity…I began to labor very hard to make myself into a fop, a cad and a snob.”

Lewis dug deeper into his love for ancient literature and myth. Within the study of these works, Lewis experienced joy as well. His extensive knowledge of mythology would come into play as Lewis approaches the bible later in life.

Nature also proved to be a source of Joy to Lewis as he was fond of taking quiet walks and observing the animals and creatures that surrounded him.

But as he grew older and more advanced in his education, Lewis found the stab of Joy occurred less and less often. He writes, “Only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something else – whether a distant mountain, or the past, or the gods of Asgard – does the ‘thrill’ arise. It is a by-product. Its very existence pre-supposes that you desire not it but something other and outer.” Lewis calls Joy a by-product. Once joy itself becomes our focus it dries up, disappears.

**SLIDE 6: Once joy itself becomes our focus it dries up, disappears.**

This lines up with what we know about joy from scripture. Many of us would be quick to name joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit, and what is fruit, if not a by-produce of the life of the plant. Joy itself is not the thing to seek after, rather it comes as a result of our living and walking in step with the Holy Spirit. Psalm 16:11 points out to us that, celebration is found in God’s presence. The word there is *simchah* and it means joy, mirth. So we cannot leave the house in the morning in search for joy, rather we seek after the God who provides us with Joy.

In 1917 Lewis was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Somerset Light Infantry. He served in the front line trenches and in various villages in northern France. Lewis was wounded by shrapnel from an exploding shell in 1918 and while in the hospital recovering, he took the time to discover some new books. About the time Lewis writes, “A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.” Lewis had stumbled on some of the great Christians authors; G.K. Chesterton and George MacDonald to name a few. He was also becoming good friends with others who claimed faith.

God would continue to assail Lewis “unscrupulously” as he puts it. He was eventually hired on as a professor at Magdalen College in Oxford. The friendships he was forming and the colleagues he most respected all happened to be Christians, author J.R.R. Tolkien being among them. His favorite authors all happened to be Christians. He concluded “Christians are wrong, but all the rest are bores.” And still, underneath it all, was the haunting of Joy. Lewis writes, “All images and sensations…soon honestly confessed themselves to be inadequate. All said, in the last resort, ‘It is not I. I am only a reminder. Look! Look! What do I remind you of?’…I had been equally wrong in supposing that I desired Joy itself…Inexorably Joy proclaimed, ‘You want – I myself am your want of – something other, outside, not you nor any state of you.’ I did not yet ask, Who is the desired? Only What is it?”

As the Holy Ghost continued to haunt Lewis with this inkling of Joy, a well-respected atheist acquaintance made a remark about the surprisingly good historical grounding that exists in support of the Gospels as we have them in the New Testament. “Rum thing.” He quipped. Lewis felt the steady, unrelenting pursuit of God himself. He writes, “I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out…I felt myself being given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut.” Lewis chose to open that door, to drop his resistance, to give in to the One who pursued, the One Wesley would say, extended prevenient grace.

**SLIDE 7: “I became aware that I was holding something at bay or shutting something out…I felt myself being given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut.”**

He says, “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…Idealism can be talked and even felt; it cannot be lived…I was to be allowed to play at philosophy no longer…In 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.”

But Christianity for Lewis, was still to come. Though he now accepted the existence of God, Jesus and the cross and eternal life were unknown to him. But as I mentioned before, his expertise, the myths in which he first discovered the glint of joy, came to play a role in his coming to Christ. READ pg. 203 in “Famous Conversions”.

**SLIDE 8: CS Lewis**

C.S. Lewis was surprised by joy. He came to realize that his greatest desire could only find satisfaction in Jesus Christ alone. That joy was but a signpost pointing onward to the God of heaven. For Lewis, there was no tears or gush of emotion as we have seen in many of these conversion stories. He was a man who lived in his head, and God met him there. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Lewis became intellectually convinced and forced to give up his previous resistance. His mission in life did not take a drastic turn. He continued teaching and writing, but the content of his books would go on to produce generations of new converts as well as shore up and strengthen the faith of countless believers. Once his head was convinced, his heart followed, and Lewis, though his natural bent hated to have to sit and respond to all the letters he received, in obedience to God, took the time to offer responses, many of which served as pastoral care to those doubting, hurting, or newly coming to faith.

In the end, the snob became a humble servant; the know-it-all admitted his ignorance, the student of myth came to realize the Jesus was myth become fact. The atheist became a Christian, and though he never served in a clerical role, the church is all the stronger for his contributions.

Maybe you know someone in your life who cannot accept Jesus on some intellectual grounds. Maybe they cannot see the reasoning behind a biblical faith. Maybe you yourself struggle to see how it all adds up. To live a life of faith is to doubt. To live a life of faith is too ask questions. My belief is not detached from my brain…I do not believe in spite of good arguments…I believe because Jesus Christ spoils every argument that is made against him. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I want to close with a few verses from 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 READ

**SLIDE 9: Although we live in the world, we don’t fight our battles with human methods. Our weapons that we fight with aren’t human, but instead they are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses. They destroy arguments, and every defense that is raised up to oppose the knowledge of God. They capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

We are empowered to destroy arguments that come against God. That doesn’t mean we begin to treat people disrespectfully and throw the bible in their faces, but it does mean that those people in out lives we refuse to turn to Christ are enveloped in bad thinking. They are believing in something and that something is a lie. They are trusting in someone and that someone cannot save them. I would encourage you, pay close attention and read carefully through the book of Romans. Follow Paul’s train of through and as you do, also read *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. We talked in depth about that book last spring, but it is very valuable because it meets the unbeliever where they are at. Lewis does not start off with bible verses or some other authority that an unbeliever does not accept. He appeals to the nature of the world…a nature that applies to us all, and he goes from there. It is a powerful book for the Christian and non-Christian because it really does seek to destroy arguments and defenses that people put up to oppose the knowledge of God. It is not only worth reading but also worth sharing with those friends and family members who just cannot seem to get over the hump of faith.

**SLIDE 10: CHOSEN**

Come September, we will be taking up a new series on the very popular series called “The Chosen”. It’s basically a mini-series that walks through the story of Jesus as found in the gospels. I think it is a great opportunity to introduce our unbelieving friends and family members to the person and work of Jesus Christ. In our grow groups we will be watching the various episodes and having a short discussion time and then on Sunday, our sermons will be based upon that week’s episode. It is a perfect time to invite your hesitant friends to come and join us. If we are not willing to challenge bad thinking, if we are not willing to extend an invitation, if we are not willing to offer Jesus then we are hardly Christians. Remember, we have said, the converted go to work, and this is our work: to share the gospel…to tell others about Jesus. So I want to encourage you all to suit up, to go out, to extend an invitation and to be disciples who make disciples. Amen!

**SLIDE 11: The Converted Go To Work**

We have a little package that you can give to your friends who you are looking to invite. Hopefully that makes your job a little easier. In it there is a little blurb about what the series is all about and what they can expect. And you can tell them all about the wonderful people that they will meet in your group, about the wonderful music they will hear in church, the wonderful sermon they will hear, but above and beyond all that, they will get to know Jesus! We are going to offer them Jesus. Let them know their questions and concerns are welcome here as they discover what Jesus said and did and how he is alive today extending forgiveness for sin and life everlasting. Please, take all the packets! Hand them out! Put them to use!