Clive Staples Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is, in part, a fantastical exploration of the biblical themes of sin and self-sacrifice. Children can easily relate these elements of the story to their religious teaching by noticing the obvious parallels between Lewis' story and the Gospel. Yet, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* follows its own rules and as such, the story is not simply an allegorical representation of the Gospel. Rather, C.S. Lewis presents the themes of sin and self-sacrifice in a unique set of events and circumstances that endorse the Gospel message and demonstrate its value to everyone, including children:

> By displaying the nature of God and the sufferings of Christ in an imaginary world stripped of the trappings of ritual and hushed devotion, [C.S. Lewis] thought he could display them to the child in their real potency (Gibson 146).

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe then is a *praeparatio evangelicum* that explores and promotes Christian themes of sin and self-sacrifice in the non-threatening fantasy world of Narnia.

In C.S. Lewis' fantasy world, the native Narnians and the human children do things that are wrong; in effect, they sin and as a result, punishment follows. Edmund is the most obvious example of a sinner (notwithstanding the White Witch). When he meets the White Witch, he succumbs to the sin of over-indulgence or gluttony. Moreover, driven by his desire for more Turkish Delight, he betrays his brothers and sisters. Sins of greed, hate and envy also begin to manifest themselves in his musings "about being a King and all the … things he would do:"

> He had just settled in his mind what sort of palace he would have and how many cars and all about his private cinema and where the principal railways would run (greed) and what laws he would make against beavers and dams (hate) and was putting the finishing touches to some scheme for keeping Peter in his place (envy), when the weather changed (Lewis 84 *parenthetical citations mine*).

As C.S. Lewis states, Edmund "was becoming a nastier person every minute" (Lewis 45). Yet, Edmund is not the only one who commits wrongful acts. Tumnus, a native Narnian faun, lies to Lucy about his intentions and "has taken service under the White Witch" (Lewis 23); Peter's pride

and anger drives Edmund away from the group (Lewis 118); and, Susan's and Lucy's doubt concerning Aslan's resurrection is reminiscent of the biblical doubting Thomas (Lewis 147). Moreover, many animals and even trees become traitors and agents of the White Witch. The constant cold and winter, with no Christmas, is also a reminder that Narnia is dominated by evil. C.S. Lewis creates a world where the lines between right and wrong are clear and present. The reader is keenly aware of these problems in Narnia because we see the world from Lucy's point of view:

> From the altogether understated beginning, "once there were four children who names were …." through their stilted initial dialogue, [Lewis] quickly and expertly draws us into Narnia with Lucy, the sweetest and most susceptible, youngest of the Pevensie children with whom we identify and through whose eyes we judge what we see. Her innocence and trust are the spectacles through which we see the unfolding action (Glover 137).

Sin is present in Narnia and as a reader, we feel as miserable as Lucy does when things go wrong. Moreover, as all fairy-tales must have a happy ending—all wrongs must be made right—the audience expects the wrongdoers to be punished accordingly.

In Narnia, just as in the real world, Lewis reveals that wrongdoing has serious but just consequences. In an essay entitled "The Harsh Morality of the Narnia Stories," Betty Saunders argues that C.S. Lewis imposes punishments on the characters that exceed the crime (414). Her argument in Edmund's case, however, excuses his wrongdoing as nothing more than a minor misdeed (414). It is clear from the story, however, that Edmund is persistent in his wrongdoing. His long walk to the Witch's house demonstrates the extent of his determination. Furthermore, it would be incorrect to view Edmund's punishment as Aslan's death. Instead, Edmund's punishment is the hardship he faces in the Witch's journey to the Stone Table. Aslan's death, while it saves Edmund's life, is a result of a transgression against the deep magic. Aslan dies because he refuses to allow Edmund to be condemned because of a Narnian law. Other examples of punishment in the story include Tumnus being turned into a statue, Edmund's trek

with the White Witch and the White Witch's death. Yet, Narnia is also a world where innocent people die. The White Witch turns many creatures into statues simply because they oppose her and more significantly, Aslan is an innocent sacrifice to satisfy the deep magic of Narnia. This inequity and the need it creates for a redemptive act allows Lewis to demonstrate another biblical theme, that of self-sacrifice.

Through the actions of the Pevensie children and Aslan, C.S. Lewis demonstrates the value of self-sacrifice and affirms, rather than illustrating by allegory, the value of Christ's work of atonement. Because of the existence of sin and the consequences of sin in the world of Narnia, Narnia needs redemption. In order to accomplish this redemption, Lewis portrays the Pevensie children and Aslan as Narnia's saviours. The children must overcome their doubts and their fears in order to save Narnia. Lucy sacrifices her reputation with her brothers and sisters by holding to her belief that Narnia is real, despite the opposition she faces. Edmund learns to swallow his pride and seek the forgiveness of his brothers and sisters for his wrongdoing. Susan learns to trust Aslan despite her fears that he might be dangerous. Peter becomes a leader who willingly undertakes the defense of Narnia against the White Witch in battle. Each child assumes their role as a Narnian savior when they choose to sacrifice their own self-interests and "identify themselves with a goodness apparently doomed to certain failure" (Edwards 433). Similarly, Aslan's greatest moment in the story comes when he chooses to give his own life to save Edmund. Aslan epitomizes self-sacrifice because he can give no promise he will return (Lewis 133). All of the sacrifices made by Pevensie children and Aslan are done in the face of wrongdoing and in order to set things right. In this way, Lewis makes the reader sympathetic to Jesus Christ's sacrifice that was accomplished on behalf of humanity's wrongdoing. Yet, while Aslan in particular appears to undertake a Christ-like Passion, Lewis is careful to avoid a purely Christological theme. Instead, the self-sacrifice of Aslan is an altogether different experience that merely prepares the reader to recognize the value of Christ's sacrifice.

Aslan's death affirms self-sacrificial love but it is not an allegorical representation of Christ's death. The similarities between the story of Aslan's death and the Gospel passion are

indeed striking. The Way of Sorrow and the innocent (Aslan) dying for the guilty (Edmund) are themes clearly found in the Gospels. Aslan, however, voluntarily offers his life for Edmund's as a sacrifice for the deep magic. Aslan's death does not save Narnia. It does not reduce the power of the White Witch. It does not bring Narnians closer to the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea as Christ's death brings us closer to God (cf. the purpose of Christ's death, 1 Pt 3:18). As Evan K. Gibson notes, "What we have in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is atonement in Narnia, not an allegory of atonement on Earth" (143). The events, the circumstances and the purpose are all different because Lewis' purpose is not to discuss the biblical theme of atonement. Instead, Lewis offers Aslan as an example of true love. In John 15:13, Jesus Christ explains this idea: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Aslan, then, fulfills this ideal and thereby, Lewis is able to demonstrate the love of God without being constrained by allegory:

> The essential thing that the story conveyed … was the principle, the *idea*, of self-sacrifice; and, in particular, the incomprehensible act of divine love which saves a situation otherwise intractable and hopeless (Caldecott 416).

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe dispenses with the hard terms, such as propitiation, redemption and salvation, and freely declares God's love in the simplest, most basic way—through a fairy-tale. In doing so, Lewis reveals the underlying principles of Christ's death and prepares the reader to hear the Gospel message. The parallels with the crucifixion then simply point to the greater love that is in our own universe.

By exploring sin and self-sacrifice in a fantasy world, C.S. Lewis gently introduces the reader to a story that has ethical, theological and christological implications. The themes become interwoven in the fantastical adventures of the Pevensie children but they also reveal themselves in the very fabric of the reader's own life. The Narnian world then is a means by which we can discover the eternal and absolute truths that govern our world, govern every world. To paraphase Aslan in *The Voyage of the Dawntreader*, Lewis brings his reader into the world of Narnia so that by discovering its truths, we might recognize them in our own world (188). And once we have discovered these truths, we will hopefully return through the wardrobe—if we have

not done a very silly thing by shutting ourselves in—and apply the lessons learned in Narnia to our own lives.

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