**Seeing Life from Inside the Stable**

Dr, Michael Metzger, Clapham Institute, December 6, 2023



The birth of Christ is more meaningful when viewed from inside the stable.

A lowly stable is a staple of the Christmas story. But C. S. Lewis reframes how we imagine the stable in *The Last Battle*, the last and darkest book in the Narnia books. It’s full of portents of doom leading readers to the portal of doom itself—a stable.

As the story closes, invaders are closing in on Tirian, the last king of Narnia, and his troops, driving them toward a small stable at the top of a hill. Inside the stable, Tash, the devil himself, awaits. One by one, people are shoved through the stable door to meet death.

“It is indeed a grim door,” says Tirian. “It is more like a mouth.”

“Oh, can’t we do anything to stop it?” says Jill in a shaken voice.

“Nay, fair friend,” says Jewel, always the insightful one. “It may be for us the door to Aslan’s country and we shall sup at his table tonight.” Jewel knows crossing the threshold of death is the necessary step into Heaven. And so we watch Tirian and his troops enter the stable.

No Tash. No little thatched stable. They instead stumble into *a wondrous world*. They stand on grass. They look up and see “the deep blue sky overhead, and the air which blew gently on their faces was that of a day in early summer.” They look in at the land, finding a grove of trees laden with beautiful fruit they’re tempted to take and eat. “It’s all right,” says Peter. “I’ve a feeling we’ve got to the country where everything is allowed.”

Tirian looks out, through a crack in the door. He sees the old Narnia, dying in the shadows of the fires. From inside the stable, he sees the difference between a shadow-life lived among shadows, and a real life lived in the light of life itself. “It seems, then,” he says, “that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places.”

“Yes,” says Lord Digory, “Its inside is bigger than its outside.” Queen Lucy agrees, drawing readers toward the Christmas story. “Yes, in our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.”

Lewis is describing how the medieval world imagined the cosmos. It is huge, soaring. The creator is infinite, overarching, ineffable. The earth is small in comparison. When medieval people looked up, it was like looking up into a towering cathedral, not into empty space. Ceilings depicted the heavens and the earth thick with spiritual beings. In looking up, people felt they were looking in to everyday life thick with these beings. When they looked out, they felt they were seeing the shadow-life lived among shadows. Medieval folks were like Lucy, “drinking everything in even more deeply than the others.”

Looking *up*, *in*, and *out*, Tirian then looks at his followers. They’re happy for him. For the first time in his life, Tirian is travelling between two worlds simultaneously. He’s drinking everything in more deeply than ever before.

C. S. Lewis felt that few modern folks, including Christians, do this. They’ve never viewed life from inside the stable. Lewis did. He lived in the “enchanted” world before the Enlightenment. Hence, he wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” He looked up, in, out.

The Christ Child is larger than the manger in which he lay. Christianity is larger than the gospel most believers imagine today. It’s higher, wider, deeper, more meaning-full than they imagine. Looking up, in, and out, the good news is what Jewel discovers in *The Last Battle*. “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. Come further up, come further in!”

Yes. “Come further in!” Aslan cries, with laughter in his eyes. “Come further up!”

Next week we’ll go further up, in, out. In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis tells us why this is essential for a meaning-full life. But it begins with life seen from inside the stable.