

All About Heaven (and a little about hell)

Week 1: Sheol and Beyond • Week 2: Rewards & Punishments • Week 3: Mansions in the Sky •

Week 4: Waiting Time • **Week 5: *The Great Divorce***

1. Video

Elinor Realizes the Truth

2. A little about the book

- Written by C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) – CS Lewis was a professor of English literature at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England and an ordinary church goer with an amazing ability to write about his faith both through stories (Chronicles of Narnia being the most famous) and non-fiction (Mere Christianity being the most famous.) Mere Christianity was based on a series of radio broadcasts he made during WWII to encourage his fellow citizens.

Lewis wrote over thirty books, including fiction, popular non-fiction, scholarly academic work and poetry. Much of his fiction are allegories – stories whose characters and plot represent deeper truths.

- Written in 1946
- The title references another book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by poet William Blake.

3. Plot Summary

The narrator dies and finds himself in a grey, drizzly, eternal urban landscape with the only sign of life around a bus stop. So he gets in line and boards the bus. The bus is driven by Jesus Christ and runs between the drizzly city (hell (or purgatory)) and heaven.

By the time the bus gets to heaven all the passengers have become ghosts, existing primarily in spirit form. In heaven they enter an enticingly beautiful landscape made entirely out of glass. It hard and sharp. Walking is painful. At the heavenly bus stop the passengers are met by friends and family members they've known on earth who offer to be their guides to the heavenly realm.

To endure the journey through heaven, the passengers must acknowledge and turn away from cherished aspects of themselves which served them well on earth but ultimately separated them from God. The bulk of the book consists of conversations between the passengers and their guides, with the passengers finding various reasons they can't stay in heaven. Having refused heaven, the passengers return to the bus and to their lives in the drizzly city – which remarkably mirror their lives on earth.

For Lewis, hell is merely an enhanced version of life on earth, one unmitigated by the leaven of Christian practice. The door to heaven is always open, but most people, once they've settled into their lives in Hell, have no desire to go.

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4. Welcome to Hell

(P1) I seemed to be standing in a busy queue by the side of a long, mean street. Evening was just closing in and it was raining. I had been wandering for hours in similar mean streets, always in the rain and always in evening twilight. Time seemed to have paused on that dismal moment when only a few shops have lit up and its not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering. And just as evening never advanced to night, so my walking had never brought me to the better parts of the town. However far I went I found only dingy lodging houses, small tobacconists, hoardings from which posters hung in rags, windowless warehouses, goods stations without trains and bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle*. I never met anyone. But for the little crowd at the bus stop, the whole town seemed to be empty.

...

(P4) “Why on earth they insist on coming I can’t imagine. They won’t like it at all when we get there, and they’d really be much more comfortable at home. Its different for you and me.”

“Do they like this place? I asked.

“As much as they like anything,” he answered. “They’ve got cinemas and fish and chip shops and advertisements and all the sorts of things they want.”

(P9) “It seems a deuce of a town,” I volunteered, “and that’s what I can’t understand. The parts of it that I saw were so empty. Was there once a much larger population?”

“Not at all,” said my neighbor. ‘The trouble is that they’re so quarrelsome. As soon as anyone arrives, he settles in some street. Before he’s been there twenty-four hours, he quarrels with his neighbor. Before the week is over, he’s quarreled so badly that he decides to move. Very likely he finds the next street empathy because all the people there have quarreled with their neighbors and moved. ... You see, moving is easy here. You’ve only got to think a house and there it is.

“That place where we caught the bus is thousands of miles from the Civic center where all the newcomers arrive from earth. All the people you’ve met were living near the bus stop, but they’d taken centuries – of our time – to get there.

(P13) The trouble is they have no needs. You get everything you want (not very good quality, of course) by just imagining it.

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(P19) I got out. The light and the coolness that drenched me were like those of a summer morning, early morning a minute or two before the sunrise, only that there was a certain difference. I had the sense of being in a larger space, perhaps even in a larger sort of space, than I had ever known before. ... It gave me a feeling of freedom, but also of exposure, possibly of danger, which continued to accompany me through all that followed.

I gasped when I saw my fellow passengers. They were transparent, fully transparent. They were in fact ghosts, man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air. The grass did not bend under their feet; even the dew drops were not disturbed.

Then some readjustment of the mind or some focusing of my eyes took place and I saw the whole phenomenon the other way round. The men were as they had always been; it was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; so much solidier than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison. I bent down and tried to pluck a daisy which was growing at my feet. The stalk wouldn't break. The little flower was hard, not like wood or even like iron, but like diamond.

(P22) "Hi, Mister," said the big man, addressing the Driver, "When have we got to be back?"

"You need never come back unless you want to," the Driver replied. "Stay as long as you please."

(P23) Long after that I saw people coming to meet us. Because they were bright I saw them while they were still very distant, and at first I did not know that they were people at all.

[The bright people (spirits) are acquaintances of the passengers (ghosts) who show up to guide the passengers into heaven.]

6. Conversation 1: The Big Man and the Murderer

(P26) "Don't you know me?" the Spirit shouted to the Ghost.

"Well I'm damned," said the Ghost. "I wouldn't have believed it. It's a fair knock-out. It isn't right, Len, you know. What about poor Jack, eh?"

"He is here," said the Spirit. "You will meet him soon enough if you stay."

"But you murdered him."

"Of course I did. It is all right now."

"All right, is it? All right for you, you mean. But what about the poor chap himself, lying cold and dead?"

"But he isn't. I have told you, you will meet him soon. He sent you his love."

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“What I’d like to understand,” said the Ghost, “is what you’re here for, as pleased as punch, you, a bloody murderer, while I’ve been walking the streets down there and living in a place like a pigsty all these years.”

“That’s a little hard to understand at first. But it is all over now. You will be pleased about it presently. Till then there is no need to bother about it.

“No need to bother about it? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?”

“No. Not as you mean. I do not look at myself. **I have given up myself.** I had to, you know, after the murder. That was what did it for me. And that was how everything began.”

(P28) [The Ghost, after summarizing his virtues] “I’m asking for nothing but my rights. You may think you can put me down ... but I got to have my rights the same as you, see?”

[The Spirit] “That’s just what I say. I haven’t got my rights, or I should not be here. You will not get yours either. You’ll get something better. Never fear.”

“I only want my rights. I’m not asking for anybody’s bleeding charity.”

“Then do. At once. Ask for Bleeding Charity.”

“I don’t want charity. I’m a decent man and if I had my rights I’d have been here long ago.”

“You can never do it like that, the Spirit said. “Your feet will never grow hard enough to walk on our grass that way. And it isn’t exactly true, you know.”

“What isn’t true?” asked the Ghost.

“You weren’t a decent man and you didn’t do your best. We none of us were and none of us did.”

[The Spirit offers again to guide the Ghost into heaven. The Ghost responds] “Tell them I’m not coming, see? I’d rather be damned than go along with you. I came here to get my rights, see? Not to go sniveling along on charity tied onto your apron-strings. If they’re too find to have me without you, I’ll go home.”

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7. Conversation 2: The Intellectual Cleric and the Young Man

[After a long conversation about whether anything is actually real]

[Spirit] “We know nothing of religion here: we think only of Christ. We know nothing of speculation. Come and see. I will bring you to Eternal Fact, the Father of all other facthood.”

[Ghost] “I should object very strongly to describing God as a ‘fact.’ The Supreme Value would surely be a less inadequate description. it is hardly...

“Do you not even believe that He exists?”

“Exists? What does Existence mean? [Continued philosophical drive]

[Spirit] “Can you, at least, still desire happiness?”

[Ghost] “Happiness, my dear Dick,” said the Ghost placidly, “happiness, as you will come to see when you are older, lies in the path of duty. Which reminds me ... Bless my soul, I’d nearly forgotten. of course I can’t come with you. I have to be back next Friday to read a paper.”

8. Conversation 3: The Vain Ghost

(P60) [Ghost. To a Spirit] “How can I go out like this among a lot of people with real, solid bodies? Its far worse than going out with nothing on would have been on Earth. Have everyone staring through me.”

[Spirit] “O, I see. But we were all a bit ghostly when we first arrived, you know. That’ll wear off. Just come out and try.”

“But they’ll see me.”

“What does it matter if they do?”

“I’d rather die.”

“But you’ve died already. There’s no good trying to go back to that.”

The Ghost made a sound something between a sob and a snarl. “I wish I’d never been born,” it said. “What are we born for?”

“For infinite happiness,” said the Spirit. “You can step out into it at any moment.”

“But I tell you, they’ll see me. ... I can’t. I tell you, I can’t.”

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9. Conversation 4: The narrator and the teacher

(P68) [Narrator to Spirit] “Is judgment not final? Is there really a way out of Hell into Heaven?”

“It depends on the way ye’re using the words. If they leave that grey town behind it will not have been Hell. To any that leaves it, it is Purgatory. And perhaps ye had better not call this country Heaven. Not Deep Heaven, ye understand. Ye can call it the Valley of the Shadow of Life. And yet to those who stay here it will have been heaven from the first. And ye can call those sad streets in the town yonder the Valley of the Shadow of Death; but to those who remain there they will have been Hell from the beginning.

“Both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective. Not only this valley, but all their earthly past will have been Heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on Earth, too, will then be seen by the damned to have been Hell. That is what mortals misunderstand. ... The good man’s past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven: the bad man’s past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness. And 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, “We were always in Hell,” and both will speak truly.”

...

(P71) [Narrator to Spirit] “What do they choose, these souls who go back? And how can they choose it?”

[Spirit] “The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words, “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.” There is always something they insist on keeping even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy – that is, to reality.

...

(P75) [Spirit to Narrator] “There are only two kinds of people in the end: 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. Without that self choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock, it is opened.”

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10. Conversation 5: The Mother and Brother

(P97)[Mother: Ghost] “O Reginald! Its you, is it?”

[Brother: Spirit] “Yes dear. I know you expected someone else...”

“I did think Michael would have come. He is here, of course?”

“He’s there – far up in the mountains”

“Why hasn’t he come to meet me? Didn’t he know?”

“My dear, it wouldn’t have done. Not yet, He wouldn’t be able to see or hear you as you are at present. You’d be totally invisible to Michael. But we’ll build you up soon.”

“I should have thought if you can see me, my own son could!”

“It doesn’t always happen like that. You see, I have specialized in this sort of work.”

“Oh its work is it?” snapped the Ghost. Then after a pause, “Well. When am I going to be allowed to see him?”

“There’s no question of being allowed, Pam. As soon as its possible for him to see you, of course he will. You need to be thickened up a bit.”

“How?”

“I’m afraid the first step is a hard one. You will become solid enough for Michael to perceive you when you learn to want Someone Else besides Michael. I don’t say “more than Michael,” not as a beginning. That will come later. Its only the little germ of a desire for God that we need to start the process.”

...”What do you want me to do? Come on. The sooner I begin it, the sooner they’ll let me see my boy. I’m quite ready.”

“But Pam, do think! You’re treating God only as a means to Michael. But the whole thickening treatment consists in learning to want God for His own sake.”

...

(P102)[Mother] “Give me my boy. Do you hear? I don’t care about all your rules and regulations. I don’t believe in a God who keeps mother and son apart. I believe in a God of love. No one had a right to come between me and my son. Not even God. Tell Him that to His face. I want my boy and I mean to have him. He is mine, do you understand? Mine, mine mine forever and ever.

...

[Brother] “How yours? You didn’t make him.”

...

(P105)[The Narrator’s Spirit guide] “Love, as mortals understand the word, isn’t enough. Every natural love will rise again and live forever in this country: but none will rise again until it has been buried.”

[Narrator] “The saying is almost too hard for us.”

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(P106)[Spirit] “There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demonic it will be if it rebels. It not out of bad mice or bad fleas you make demons but out of bad archangels. The false religion of lust is baser than the false religion of mother-love or patriotism or art; but lust is less likely to be made into a religion.”

11. The Angel and the Lizard

(P106) I saw coming toward us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of hi he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. “Shut up, tell you!” he said.

“Off so soon?” said a voice. (The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him.)

“Yes, I’m off,” said the Ghost. “Thanks for all your hospitality. But its no good, you see. I told this little chap (here he indicated the Lizard) that he’d have to be quiet if he came. But he won’t stop. I shall have to go home.”

“Would you like me to make him quiet?” said the flaming Spirit – an angel, as I now understood.

“Of course I would,” said the Ghost.

“Then I will kill him,” said the Angel, taking a step forward.

...

(P109) [Ghost] “Get back! You’re burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You’d kill me if you did.”

[Angel] “It is not so.”

...

(P110)[Angel] Then may I [kill it]?

[Ghost] Damn and blast you! Go on, can’t you? Get it over. Do what you like,” bellowed the Ghost: but ended, whimpering, “God help me. God help me.”

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed his crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while ti bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

“Ow! That’s done for me,” gasped the Ghost, reeling backward.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solider, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. The brighter still and stronger, the leg and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not

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wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man, an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel.

What distracted me was the fact that at the same moment something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. ... What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen...

...

(P113)[Narrator's Spirit Guide] "Do you understand all this, my Son?" said the Teacher.

[Narrator] "I don't know about all, Sir. Am I right in thinking the Lizard really turned into the Horse?"

"Aye. But it was killed first. Ye'll not forget that part of the story?"

"I'll try not to, Sir. But does it mean that everything – everything – that is in us can go to the Mountains?"

"Nothing, not even the best and noblest, can go on as it now is. Nothing, not even what is lowest and most bestial, will not be raised again if it submits to death. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Flesh and blood cannot come to the Mountains. Not because they are too rank, but because they are too weak."

12. The Pebble of Hell

(P138) [Narrator to Spirit Guide, looking down a crack in the earth] "Do you mean then that Hell – all that infinite, empty town – is down in some little crack like this?"

[Spirit] "Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of this world, the Real World. Look at yon butterfly. It is wallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste."

"It seems big enough when you're in it, Sir."

"And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heave, would have no weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good. If all Hell's miseries together entered the consciousness of yon wee yellow bird on the bough there, they would be swallowed up without a trace, as if one drop of ink had been dropped into that Great Ocean to which your terrestrial Pacific itself is only a molecule.

"I see," I said at last. "She couldn't fit into Hell."

He nodded. "There's not enough room for her," he said. "Hell could not open its mouth wide enough."

"And she couldn't make herself smaller? – like Alice [in Wonderland] you know."

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“Nothing like small enough. For a damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouth for food, or their eyes to see.”

“Then no one can ever reach them?”

“Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend. Only One has descended into Hell”

“And will He ever do so again?”

“It was not once long ago that He did it. Time does not work that way when once ye have left the Earth. All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending. There is no spirit in prison to Whom He did not preach.