



Mere Christianity

Week 6: June 24, 2018

“The Christian Virtue of Hope”

A Central Theme

One of the central themes that run throughout nearly all Lewis’ writing is the deep, insatiable longing that seems to be built in each of us. There are all kinds of things in this world, Lewis observes, that promise to fulfill this ingrained longing — things such as falling in love, traveling to a new country, starting a new job, or learning a new subject. The problem, Lewis maintains, is that “they never quite keep their promise” (135). No matter how good the husband or wife, how excellent the hotels and scenery, or how interesting the new job or subject, the initial excitement always fades, leaving us still feeling a deep desire for something that we cannot quite put our finger on.

In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, one of the first things that Lewis makes clear is that by *Joy* — always spelled with a capital “J” — he does not mean *joy* in the normal sense of happiness or elation. Lewis uses *Joy* to refer to the strange, intense longing he felt, beginning in childhood and continuing throughout his life. Lewis writes, “It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but a desire for what? ... Before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again.” Although he did not know what this desire was for or where it came from, Lewis knew one thing: It was very powerful, so powerful that he finds it hard to come up with words strong enough to describe it. At the same time it is also colored by a feeling of sadness or sorrow, but this sadness is a kind that we want, for this unsatisfied desire is “more desirable than any other satisfaction.”

In The Weight of Glory, Lewis refers to this mysterious longing as a desire for a “far-off country,” a yearning for “something that has never actually appeared in our experience.” Lewis writes about this feeling in The Problem of Pain as well, where he refers to it as “that something which you were born desiring” and the thing that we were made for.¹

Further Study

Question 1: Can you identify with the experience of mysterious longing that Lewis writes about in chapter ten — this longing that nothing in this world can satisfy? Have you felt it yourself? How would you describe it?

¹ From *Discussing Mere Christianity: Exploring the History, Meaning, and Relevance of C. S. Lewis’ Greatest Book* by Devin Brown (Zondervan, 2015)

Question 2: Lewis writes that the whole focus of our education tends “to fix our minds on this world” (135). What has helped to break the enchantment of worldliness in your life?

Question 3: Paul writes: “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). What does heavenly citizenship mean to you? How do you personally live with the present and future tensions that Paul describes here?

A Look Ahead

July 1, 2018

“God In Three Persons”

Mere Christianity chapters covered:

- Book 4, Chapter 1: “Making and Begetting”
- Book 4, Chapter 2: “The Three-Personal God”

July 8, 2018

“Counting the Cost”

Mere Christianity chapters covered:

- Book 4, Chapter 9: “Counting the Cost”
- Book 4, Chapter 10: “Nice People or New Men”

July 15, 2018

Q&A

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