Set 3 - Lecture 1

(0:20 - 0:34)
Let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for this morning and for each person present. We pray that you might give us clarity in this time.

(0:34 - 0:57)
We might be able to better speak the truth in love for having been here and part of this series of talks. And I pray that you might help us this morning to understand more of the beauty and power of the gospel and how to communicate it. Especially your servant C.S. Lewis that we're going to look at this morning.

(0:57 - 1:10)
That you might give us clarity on his life and allow us to learn from him how we can speak to the idea of reason and imagination. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

(1:10 - 1:44)
I want to speak about reason and imagination and particularly to use C.S. Lewis as a vehicle for helping us to do that. I want to show how particularly imagination is essentially linked to reason if you want to communicate anything, especially faith in Christ. So again, to show how imagination is essentially linked to reason if you want to communicate anything, especially faith in Christ.

(1:45 - 2:03)
And I want to focus on a saying of Lewis that goes like this. That reason is the natural organ of truth and imagination is the organ of meaning. It's always good, I've heard in a talk, to say what you're going to say, then say it, then say what you said.

(2:03 - 2:18)
And in this talk, this is the main point. I hope by the end of this time you'll be able to understand better how imagination relates to reason. And that will give you some clarity on better being able to communicate your faith.

(2:19 - 2:41)
I'm going to give you a quick introduction to C.S. Lewis so you can see how he can help you on this. And then give you some specific help from his life personally and then his teaching on the subject. First of all, who is C.S. Lewis? Most of you know, but for those of you who don't know, he was an Oxford professor of English literature.

(2:42 - 2:57)
He was born November 29th, 1898 and died September 22nd, 1963. The date of his death was also the date on which John F. Kennedy was assassinated. So he got a lot less notice than he might have otherwise.

(2:57 - 3:32)
C.S. Lewis became particularly known in America when he was on the front cover of Time magazine, September 8th, 1947. And the picture on the front of Time magazine said, Oxford C.S. Lewis, his heresy, Christianity. And the shock was that here was this sophisticated

Oxford don at the top of his profession in English literature, at a world class university that actually believed in supernatural Christianity, including things like miracles.

(3:32 - 3:59)
And he was just coming out with a book on miracles and screw tape letters, angels and demons. So that was a great shock to people back in the 40s that he believed in these things and actually defended them philosophically. He became particularly known in the BBC in England for radio addresses that became the book Mere Christianity.

(4:00 - 4:39)
In fact, it's said that he became the second best known radio voice in all of England, second only to Winston Churchill. It's said that in the pubs there in England, when he would talk and the radio addresses were to come on, that people would turn up the radio and tell everybody to be quiet and listen to his talks because they spoke so profoundly into the situation that people were there struggling with in England. So he became particularly known in terms of his radio addresses.

(4:39 - 5:01)
He made an impact in various areas. In the academic arena, he wrote books like English Literature in the 16th Century, an Allegory of Love. Some of those books, including The Discarded Image and others, are still read by people in English literature because they're tremendously helpful in terms of what they communicate.

(5:01 - 5:30)
English Literature in the 16th Century took him 16 years to write because he felt he had to read every book in English written in the 16th Century before he could write the book. That's an amazing thing that he set out to do there, to be able to do that. He had an incredible, not only a desire to work, but he had an incredible intellect and an incredible memory.

(5:31 - 6:08)
He said he was cursed by the ability not to forget anything that he ever read so that he would remember things. For instance, there was a time when he was going away from Oxford to Cambridge, and they had a going-away dinner at Madeleine College, and he was talking about how he was having difficulty writing poetry because he would be writing a couple lines and then remember that it was plagiarized. It was from another poem that he'd read.

(6:09 - 6:25)
Somebody challenged him on that and said, surely that can't be the case, that you don't forget anything you've ever read. He said, well, yeah. Somebody decided to challenge him and went to the library and got out a little red book of poems, a book that C.S. Lewis had read.

(6:25 - 6:38)
He opened the book at random and began to read it. C.S. Lewis said, stop. Then he proceeded to quote about ten lines of the poem.

(6:38 - 7:06)

Then people were there very hushed, and the conversation was very slow to begin again. It's a rather amazing ability he had to not only be able to read, but to be able to retain what he's reading. When you combine that with incredible rhetorical skills and ability to argue, he was a very formidable person, not only in speaking and in writing, but in person.

(7:07 - 7:24)
For instance, he was a leader of the Socratic Club that would take on atheists. Atheists would come and give addresses, and he would respond, or believers would respond, or they'd have a believer there, and the atheists would respond. It was a debate about the highest level.

(7:24 - 7:44)
C.S. Lewis always loved to be in the middle of the fray, in the middle of arguments. He had a group called the Inklings that used to meet regularly at the Eagle and the Child, or the Lamb and the Flag, or various other places around Oxford. They immediately would go at each other, even though they were friends.

(7:44 - 7:57)
There was no quarter given or taken. They would be vigorously coming at each other's ideas and being willing to engage with them. In any case, in his academic area, he was excellent.

(7:58 - 8:20)
He also wrote books in the apologetic arena, giving a defense for faith. Books like Mere Christianity, Miracles, Screwtape Letters, Problem of Pain, Abolition of Man, The Great Divorce, and others that were very helpful to people in being able to understand their faith. In the area of fiction, we all know the Narnia Chronicles and the Space Trilogy.

(8:20 - 8:45)
Perhaps we know less about another novel, Till We Have Faces, although Lewis said that this was perhaps his best book, he felt, or his best novel was Till We Have Faces. By the way, he said his most important book was Abolition of Man, and his favorite book was Perlandra, the second one of the Space Trilogy. So anyway, Lewis wrote a lot of fiction.

(8:45 - 9:08)
Of course, we know his ability to do that, because the Narnia Chronicles have been made into film recently. And the rather surprising thing, I remember I used to joke a number of years ago, maybe someday we'll see Aslan in McDonald's. As a matter of fact, I have two full sets of characters of Narnia from McDonald's, as I keep saying.

(9:11 - 9:24)
In another area that he pursued was the area of poetry. In fact, he set out, first of all, to be a great poet. He wanted to be something like a poet laureate of England.

(9:25 - 9:48)
But interestingly, that's the area where he didn't succeed as much so. I've read most of his poetry, and it's okay, but it never rises, in my mind, to the level of greatness. So it's an interesting irony that the area that he set out most to achieve, you might say that he failed.

(9:49 - 10:04)

But the area that he didn't set out, at least initially, to pursue, he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. So there's hope for us. If you feel like you fall short in a particular area, that doesn't mean that your life is over.

(10:05 - 10:25)
In fact, he had a major failure that almost kept him from Oxford. He had to take a math exam in order to get into Oxford. It was required, and twice he failed the math exam, which was an essential requirement for admission.

(10:26 - 10:48)
And later he went to fight right after that in the First World War, and when he came back, they made an exemption from passing the math exam to anybody that had fought in the war. And that's the only way he got into Oxford. We wouldn't know about C.S. Lewis and, of course, his genius, if it hadn't been for the First World War.

(10:50 - 11:34)
So that's another hope for us. We don't have to feel like we're incredible or excellent in every area in order to excel in one area or maybe two areas, and we see that particularly with Lewis. Now Lewis has become even better known through some films, particularly the BBC version first of Shadowlands that had Josh Acklin and Claire Bloom being the primary actors, and that was very excellently done and relatively accurate in terms of its setting forth of that period of the marriage of C.S. Lewis to Joy and then her cancer and the tragedy and struggle that's there.

(11:35 - 11:54)
So it was a very emotionally powerful film, and it won the International Emmy for the best drama and was shown on British national TV. Later we had the Hollywood version of Shadowlands made with Anthony Hopkins and Deborah Winger. I've been meaning to ask you about your brother's books.

(11:55 - 12:15)
Does he actually know any children? Sure, Jack, of course. How on earth does he pull it off? A very similar story with a similar script as the foundation and even similar camera angles. The difference would be it was even more powerful emotionally and perhaps less accurate in terms of its portrayal of Lewis.

(12:16 - 12:59)
In fact, at one time we were in Ireland with a C.S. Lewis group and went to Douglas Grasham, C.S. Lewis' stepson, who has a place in Ireland, and we spent time with him and asked him about the accuracy of Shadowlands, the Hollywood version, and he said that the movie was emotionally true, and I thought that was a particularly wise and powerful response, that it did catch up the emotion that was there, particularly in that last scene where he's weeping with his son, sobbing. That particularly was accurate, and even the screenwriters didn't know that that had actually happened, but it did. In any case, that really helped advance C.S. Lewis' popularity.

(12:59 - 13:29)
In the year after Shadowlands, the Hollywood version came out, there were one million sets of Narnia sold, and I know when the first one of the Narnia Chronicles came out, The Witch

and the Wardrobe, the Narnia Chronicles, the whole set, was at the top of Amazon for a number of weeks. Many people have been exposed to C.S. Lewis through the realm of the imagination, particularly through his Narnia Chronicles. C.S. Lewis is still popular today.

(13:30 - 13:48)
Christianity Today did a survey of the book that had impacted Christians most, other than the Bible. And number one in the list was mere Christianity. So he still has a great power in the culture in general, and with Christians in particular.

(13:49 - 14:23)
Now, C.S. Lewis thought that his books would fade away when he died, as most books do. Instead, they've, if anything, increased, and virtually all, if not all, of his books are still in print. But why has C.S. Lewis retained his popularity? And I would suggest that it's how he related reason to imagination, and if we can learn from him, we can help our communication of the gospel as well.

(14:23 - 14:48)
Let me just point out that other culture shapers have had the same talent. Jean-Paul Sartre, the atheist existentialist, was able to deal well in both realms, reason and imagination. In reason, he was able to write philosophical books such as Being and Nothingness, and he was also able to write drama, such as, for instance, the play No Exit, which is a very vivid, unforgettable play, if you've read it.

(14:49 - 15:18)
But C.S. Lewis was able to do the same. He was able to, say, write a critique of relativism in Abolition of Man, and then able to deal with the same ideas in That Hideous Strength, the last one of the space trilogy. In fact, it's been said and argued, and I think it's true, that all of the great ideas that C.S. Lewis had, he took and really embedded within the Narnia Chronicles.

(15:19 - 15:43)
So I found, when I was reading the Narnia Chronicles to my boys, when they were about five and seven for the first time, and later I read it to them later, I would get more excited about some of the passages than they would. I mean, they enjoyed it. But they absolutely loved, they loved things, but I was excited about the depths of understanding that were there, and the power of the idea.

(15:43 - 16:20)
So that's a very unique quality, to be able to take philosophical, theological ideas and write it with such simplicity and clarity that children could grasp it and understand it. In fact, he argued, and that was the main theme that I want to pursue here, that reason is the natural organ of truth, and imagination is the organ of meaning. He has an essay in Selected Literary Essays called Bluesfells and Flanisfers, Invented Words, where he talks about how we come to understand things in terms of language and in terms of ideas.

(16:20 - 16:33)
And the idea was that unless there's some kind of picture or metaphor with which we associate an idea, we really don't grasp it. And only to the degree that we have a picture are we able to do so. And I think that was C.S. Lewis' gift.

(16:34 - 16:59)
He was able to take great ideas and put it out in terms of fiction, and also in terms of his prose writing, or his more apologetic writing, such as Mere Christianity. He would use metaphors that were so vivid and unforgettable that it made his point. You say, aha, I get the idea, because of how clearly he was able to put it in a nutshell, in a picture, a story.

(17:00 - 17:23)
For instance, one of my favorite quotes has that. He says this, Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink, sex, and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child content to play with mud pies in a slum because he doesn't know what it means to have a holiday at the sea.

(17:24 - 17:45)
We are far too easily pleased. And particularly, it's a very powerful quote where the idea is very compact and clearly expressed. But the picture of the mud pies and the holiday make, it's the like, it's the picture, the metaphor that he uses to make his point that gives his work such power.

(17:46 - 18:08)
So he's able to follow both the way of reason and the way of imagination. He's able to write theology or apologetics, philosophy with graphic images, and also able to write novels with profound ideas, with theology and philosophical ideas deeply embedded in them. And that's a rare talent to be able to work equally in both realms.

(18:09 - 18:41)
And I hope to encourage you to be able to do both as well, to learn how to both use the realm of reason and to use the realm of imagination throughout this class. And I think that the reason why C.S. Lewis was so good at these things is because it was essential to have imagination involved within his own conversion. He started out in his life in a rather conventional Anglican church.

(18:42 - 18:58)
And he tried to put his faith into practice for a little while. But then he essentially gave it up for a number of reasons. If you want to see that, look at the autobiography, Surprised by Joy, and you can see some of the process that happened there.

(18:59 - 19:13)
But on his way to faith, to true faith in Christ, there were a few stages. The first stage, he said, was the baptism of his imagination. He was at this time a rather firmly entrenched atheist.

(19:15 - 19:31)
And he had a train ride where he went into a bookstall of the train station and bought a little book, a book by George MacDonald called Fantasties. And he said something happened to him as he read that book. He said something leapt off the page at him.

(19:33 - 19:49)

Later he was able to describe that quality as goodness or holiness, but he didn't quite know what it was at the time. And he said that that book, which is a fairy tale, an imaginative book, baptized his imagination. And he was never the same again.

(19:51 - 20:04)
Imagination was the first realm that was impacted. His imagination was baptized. And then his reason was impacted or satisfied.

(20:05 - 20:18)
And then his will submitted. His imagination baptized his reason satisfied and his will submitted. So it went through three particular steps.

(20:19 - 21:01)
And so it's not surprising that Lewis would feel since his imagination was so important as a first stage along the way that that might be important for others as well. And so he set out later, perhaps not fully consciously, the Narnia Chronicles were not written as an allegory or with any kind of evangelistic attempt they started with images, but later they ended up, of course, a lot of his own beliefs were expressed within it. And he thought later as he looked at it that perhaps the Narnia Chronicles could be used to baptize the imagination of various other people, providing a first step to move towards Christ.

(21:02 - 21:48)
Or another way that he put it was to get past the watchful dragons of our religiosity that might glaze over at God words but come in through the back door and be able to impact people unawares so that they're moved by things that if it were expressed in traditional language they might not understand or really grasp. By the way, other culture shapers have tried to do this. For instance, Philip Pullman, who's an atheist, has written a series of three parts that is attempting to baptize the imagination of atheist kids so that they'll be able to communicate their atheism.

(21:50 - 22:09)
It's the Dark series and it's the first one, the Golden Compass, has come out in film form. And in the last one of the series, actually they kill God. And so there's a real attempt to be able to forward atheism through using literature.

(22:10 - 22:36)
And by the way, I found recently on the internet that there are atheist camps that are training high school kids to be effective in communicating their atheism as they grow up and as they go to university and beyond as an adult. So there's a real concerted attempt to not only teach atheist kids but to do it in terms of baptizing the imagination. And Philip Pullman is very consciously anti-C.S. Lewis, anti-Narnia.

(22:36 - 22:52)
He knows what C.S. Lewis was trying to do and consciously is trying to use the same approach for atheism. Another person who does the same thing is actually in Star Wars. It's a very interesting phenomenon.

(22:52 - 23:23)

George Lucas, and this is according to Joseph Campbell who wrote some very popular books on myth. He said that George Lucas' attempt in putting forward the whole Star Wars series was to prepare a new generation by using this imaginative form, prepare a new generation for receiving New Age or Eastern thought through using the imagination there, through using those films. And you see much of Eastern religion embedded in the films.

(23:23 - 23:52)
We'll talk about that later as we deal with the New Age movement in a later lecture. You can read Surprised by Joy or perhaps the book that I wrote, C.S. Lewis' Case for Christ, deals with some of the intellectual objections he had to overcome in order to come to faith in Christ. So his imagination was baptized, his reason satisfied, and there were a number of rational objections that had to be addressed, and then his will submitted.

(23:53 - 24:15)
And in both cases, his first coming to believe in God was not a spectacular emotional conversion. He said he felt for a long time the unrelenting approach of one whom he desperately desired not to meet. And finally he knelt in his rooms at Oxford, he said, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.

(24:15 - 24:30)
So it wasn't a spectacular emotional affair. And that first stage was really just coming to a belief in God. And after that, he spent about two years searching through different religions so that he could decide which one to follow.

(24:31 - 24:56)
And he wasn't sure exactly which way he would go, and he had a number of discussions with people. A lot of people, as we'll see in a minute, that were part of a group that were studying Icelandic mythology, including J.R.R. Tolkien, who was instrumental in C.S. Lewis coming to Christ. But finally he did come to believe that Christ was the Son of God, but again, it wasn't a spectacular emotional thing.

(24:56 - 25:18)
He said he was going with his brother Warren to the Whipsnade Zoo, and he got onto a motorcycle. Warren was driving the motorcycle, and C.S. Lewis was riding in the sidecar of the motorcycle. And he said when he left for the Whipsnade Zoo, he didn't believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but when he arrived at the zoo, he did.

(25:19 - 25:37)
Yet nothing happened, no particular line of thought, no argument in the process. He said it was as if and again, this is where his pictures and analogies and metaphors are so helpful. He said it's as if you think of the first moment when you're awake, and you know you're awake in the morning.

(25:39 - 25:54)
And that's what it was like. He said at one point he was asleep, and then he woke up. And all of a sudden, oh, he said, oh, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and I'm now awake to that idea.

(25:54 - 26:11)

Again, it wasn't a spectacular emotional thing. Of course, he grew in his understanding there. But during the process of time, leading up to his conversion to belief in God, there particularly was involved a tension between his reason and his imagination.

(26:12 - 26:40)
He was involved in reading a lot of the atheists of his time, including the ideas, at least, that led Bertrand Russell, who was a leading atheist, to say that as an atheist, you face a rather grim, meaningless view of the universe. And he said atheists have to live their lives on the basis of unyielding despair. Live your lives on the basis of unyielding despair.

(26:41 - 27:04)
Later, Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus held similar kinds of approach. Albert Camus said the only really serious philosophical question for the atheist is whether or not to commit suicide. Or Jean-Paul Sartre said that the whole sum of life, in the title of one of his books, was nausea.

(27:04 - 27:22)
And one of the lines in No Exit was, hell is other people. So there was a rather negative view of seeing the implications of atheism as a rather grim, meaningless philosophy. The new atheists are trying to change the image on that, but that's been a long tradition in terms of atheism.

(27:23 - 27:54)
And on the other hand, the things that he loved in literature, truth, goodness, beauty, struggling with issues of meaning, of life and death, and immortality, those kinds of issues were things that he profoundly struggled with as well. And there was a kind of tension and contradiction between the realm of his imagination that really grasped for meaning and dignity in all these issues. And his reason that was moving towards his grim, meaningless universe.

(27:55 - 28:23)
So his logic of his position was going one way, and the things he loved were pushing him another way. As we'll see later, that he was pushing himself to the logical conclusion, I believe, of his assumptions, and then also felt drawn towards an adequate basis for his highest aspirations. So he was going, or pulled, in terms of attention, in a sense, between the two hemispheres of his brain were being pulled apart.

(28:23 - 28:32)
Here's the way he puts it. Such then was the state of my imaginative life. Over against it stood the life of my intellect.

(28:32 - 28:46)
The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side, a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth, and on the other, a glib and shallow rationalism. Nearly all that I loved, I believed to be imaginary.

(28:46 - 29:11)
Nearly all I believed to be real, I thought grim and meaningless. So there was this tension that was happening. He started to notice, even as he was reading, and he was a voluminous

reader, reading massive numbers of books, and he found that, interestingly, the books that were most at odds with his perspective as an atheist really drew him and attracted him.

(29:12 - 29:27)
And the books that were most sympathetic with his worldview, atheist books, he found interesting and entertaining, but they didn't quite have a quality that he was looking for in them. Here's the way he describes it. He said, all the books were beginning to turn against me.

(29:28 - 29:45)
Indeed, I must have been blind as a bat not to have seen long before the ludicrous contradiction between my theory of life and my actual experiences as a reader. George MacDonald had done more to me than any other writer. Of course, it was a pity he had this bee in his bonnet about Christianity.

(29:45 - 29:57)
He was good in spite of it. Chesterton had more sense than all the moderns put together, baiting, of course, his Christianity. Johnson was one of the few authors whom I felt I could trust utterly.

(29:57 - 30:07)
Curiously enough, he had the same kink. Spencer and Milton, by strange coincidence, had it too. Even among ancient authors, the same paradox was to be found.

(30:08 - 30:28)
The most religious, such as Plato and Virgil, were clearly those on whom I could really feed. On the other hand, those writers who did not suffer from religion, with whom my sympathy ought to have been complete, Shaw and Wells and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire, all seemed a little thin, what we as boys called tinny. It wasn't that I didn't like them.

(30:28 - 30:37)
They were all, especially Gibbon, entertaining, but hardly more. There seemed to be no depth in them. They were too simple.

(30:38 - 30:58)
The roughness and density of life did not appear in their books. The upshot of it all could nearly be expressed in a perversion of Roland's great line in the Chanson, Christians are wrong, but all the rest are boars. So that imagination was pushing him towards his highest aspirations.

(30:59 - 31:19)
So as I say, his imagination was baptized, his reason satisfied, and his will submitted. And that's something to keep in mind when you deal with addressing others. You don't necessarily want to go directly to the will, and you might not, in some cases, want to go directly to the reason.

(31:19 - 31:38)

Although, you have to use wisdom to discern that. It could be that the first realm that needs to be impacted is the imagination. Let me give you one more illustration of what was helpful to Lewis, and particularly use the illustration of the difficulty that he had with mythology.

(31:39 - 32:16)
When he was coming up in his school training, they used to read a lot of the ancient myths, and they were often in religious schools that had an Anglican foundation where they had chapels and that kind of thing. And it used to be assumed that the myths were false, but Christianity that had some similar elements was true. And he had the thought, well, on what basis should Christianity be exempted from the same sort of criticism and discarding that the myths said? And that was a real difficulty in Stumbling Block, and one of the things that actually moved him towards his atheism.

(32:18 - 32:31)
In fact, he was brought up reading the ancient myths. There's a sense in which he was more attracted to this perspective than anything else. He had a pagan mentality.

(32:32 - 32:47)
He speaks about that. He read especially the great northern myths, the Norse and later the Icelandic mythology was something that he was brought up reading. He had a captivity to it.

(32:47 - 32:59)
And there are a number of passages that show this. I'll just give one from Surprised by Joy. As a young man, he just saw a picture that illustrated Siegfried in Twilight of the Gods.

(32:59 - 33:17)
And it's as if, in his mind, the sky turned around. He said, pure northerness engulfed me, a vision of huge clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of the northern summer. Remoteness, severity, the memory of joy itself.

(33:18 - 33:33)
When he got to Oxford, he joined the Icelandic study group that was led by J.R.R. Tolkien. He had to learn Icelandic to join the group. He wasn't too impressed with Tolkien when he met him.

(33:34 - 33:53)
In fact, he wrote in his diary after an academic meeting where he met Tolkien for the first time that he was a pale, fluent chap only needing a smack or so. Later, they became rather fast friends. They would get together regularly, say for breakfast or lunch, and have discussions, some of them philosophical.

(33:54 - 34:21)
I'm sure it had a great deal to do with his coming to belief in God, and certainly, as we'll see, a great deal to do with his coming to Christ. The kinds of discussions that they had. But he joined this Icelandic study group called the Kolbeiders because he loved this, and he found that a number of the people in the group were committed believers that believed in a supernatural version of Christianity, like the miracles and the resurrection and that kind of thing.

(34:22 - 34:36)
They were also some of the most intelligent people there at Oxford. It kind of blew his image of believers. Later, he says that he was a converted pagan living in the midst of apostate Puritans.

(34:36 - 34:55)
Thought it was a particularly apt image that he had this more pagan mentality in the United Kingdom. Well, as I say, one of his early objections was this parallel between mythology and the Bible. And here's what he says.

(34:55 - 35:11)
No one ever attempted to show in what sense Christianity fulfilled paganism or paganism prefigured Christianity. The accepted position seemed to be that religions were normally a mere farrago of nonsense. Though our own by fortunate exception was true.

(35:12 - 35:37)
But on what grounds could I believe this exception? It obviously wasn't some general sense the same kind of thing as all the rest. Why was it so differently treated? Need I at any rate continue to treat it differently? I was very anxious not to. So he struggled with this objection for quite a while until and probably there were a number of previous conversations that led up to this.

(35:38 - 35:52)
He was having dinner one night at Magdalen College at Oxford with Tolkien and Dyson. And Lewis made the statement along these lines. He said, myths are lies.

(35:53 - 36:22)
And Tolkien said, no, they're not. And that precipitated a virtually all night debate on the whole subject. And they ended up getting up after dinner and walking around the rather beautiful grounds of Magdalen College and it continued on until Tolkien went back to his home where he had a family at about three o'clock in the morning and I guess he and Dyson continued until about five in the morning discussing this issue.

(36:23 - 36:52)
It went something along these lines. Nobody knows the exact give and take of it but Tolkien argued that it's not surprising and this is my own words, it's not surprising that there'd be certain recurring stories that would happen in the world because God has made the world and God has made the human mind. Some people have said that there are only eight basic story lines and all the other stories are just a variation of these eight basic stories.

(36:53 - 37:29)
So it's not surprising that there'd be a similar structure to the story. But the real question to ask is this. Are any of these stories, these myths, more true than the others or to put it another way, are any of these myths, have they actually become fact? Another thing that Tolkien likely argued because we see it in his writings and I can imagine he would certainly put it forward with force is the idea that all great stories, especially fairy stories, which became a favorite of Lewis later on, have what's called a ewe catastrophe.

(37:30 - 37:46)

The ewe meaning a good catastrophe. For instance, let me use the Disney film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I know my kids when they saw it when they were very young, they were so scared at that witch that came in.

(37:46 - 38:08)
In fact, I just heard someone recently that couldn't watch it when they were a kid because it was so scary. You have, of course, the story there where you have Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and the witch comes with her poison apple and gives it to Snow White, and you keep saying in your mind, don't eat it, don't eat it, but then she eats it. And, of course, she falls down.

(38:08 - 38:38)
And that's the great catastrophe is Snow White's death. But, of course, the catastrophe is essential, in a certain way, to the happy ending that sooner or later Prince Charming comes along and gives her a kiss, and she wakes up, and they all live happily ever after, the end. So you have the great catastrophe that ends up being for the good.

(38:39 - 38:57)
And what Tolkien argued is the great catastrophe, in fact, you could say the worst thing that could ever happen to anybody anywhere is that the Son of God died on a cross. And after that, all other tragedy is relativized. Or put in perspective.

(38:58 - 39:27)
The greatest tragedy that's ever happened, the greatest eucatastrophe is that the Son of God died on a cross. But, of course, the other side of that is what? The resurrection and the ascension and the ascending of the spirit and so on. So it's not surprising that this would be the case, except, Tolkien argued, that this myth was also fact, also objectively true within history.

(39:29 - 39:36)
At that time, Lewis was examining the gospel narratives. And he was an expert, a professional, in the area of mythology. And here's what he said.

(39:37 - 39:51)
He says, I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste. Yet the very matter which they set down in their artless historical fashion was precisely the matter of the great myths.

(39:51 - 40:04)
If ever a myth had become fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. Here and here only in old time, the myth must have become fact. The word flesh, God-man.

(40:04 - 40:20)
This is not a religion nor a philosophy. It's the summing up and actuality of them all. And we'll look later at the objective basis and the fact basis of Christianity, which sets it apart from all other religions.

(40:21 - 40:35)

So I'll try to make that case later on. But this idea the myth become fact is also at the root of how he came to regard other religions. That if you're a Christian, you do not have to believe that all other religions are simply wrong all through.

(40:36 - 40:55)
If you're an atheist, you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the world is simply one huge mistake. But if you're a Christian, you're free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth. And that we'll come to see later as we view other religions.

(40:56 - 41:15)
We'll look at that idea as well. But Lewis, just to underline this in the midst of the myth become fact, lest you be lacking in clarity on it, he did maintain that faith in Christ was true. In fact, he said this, that if faith in Christ is true, Jesus Christ really did come in the flesh.

(41:15 - 41:32)
If he did live a perfect life and do miracles, and if he was really crucified on a cross, and was raised from the dead. If it's true, it's of infinite importance. If it's not true, it's of no importance, except as a cultural artifact.

(41:33 - 41:44)
But the one thing it cannot be is of moderate importance. Again, if true, it's of infinite importance. If it's not true, it's of no importance.

(41:44 - 43:46)
But the one thing it cannot be is of moderate importance. Let me just take one more step here before we go to our conclusion and see how that more fully relates to apologetics. Let me just illustrate how a C.S. Lewis worldview, an approach towards imagination, contrasts quickly with another of the more postmodern variety.

In postmodernism, and we'll look at that particularly next week, the whole approach to literature is that of interrogating texts. You start not with enjoying literature, but you start with asking questions, trying to see the motifs that underlie the ideas or the motives. Particularly you look for racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and other things that are underneath the text, to the degree that one postmodern professor said that he wanted to destroy his students' love of literature.

So the whole motif was suspicion, to read between the lines, to go against the grain of literature, to get down underneath, to be analyzed, to be critical, to be suspicious of text. There's a sense in which you might say that the whole methodology led to a kind of perfect fear that cast out love of literature. You're so afraid of what the underlying implications or motives of the text are that you're prevented from really loving and embracing that writer.

On the other hand, Lewis said this. He wanted to receive literature, to look, listen, receive, get yourself out of the way. Many use, but few receive literature.

And one of the things he loved is to see the world to other people's eyes, even if that perspective was alien in some ways to his own. He said, my own eyes are not enough for me. I will see through those of others.

(43:47 - 44:25)
Reality even seen through the eyes of many is not enough. I will see what others have invented. Literary experience heals the wound without undermining the privilege of individuality.

In reading great literature, I become a thousand men yet remain myself. Here, as in worship, in love, and moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself, and I'm never more myself than when I do. He said that without this exposure to the world through literature and other views, he said one might be, quote, full of goodness and good sense, but he inhabits a tiny world.

(44:26 - 52:35)
Because in it, we should be suffocated. The man who's contended to be only himself and therefore less of self is in prison. So, pretty profound look at the place of literature within our lives.

And particularly, he says in reading literature, his methodology was to get out of yourself and allow yourself to get into the mind and the mentality of other people, whether they come from a different racial or ethnic background. That's a good thing. You try to see the world in the way they see it.

You get out of yourself and you get into another person's perspective. And that's very much what we do when we're involved in loving people and in a, say, a good friendship. You get out of yourself and you suspend your own belief system and you try to see the world through the other person's eyes.

You try to see things by getting into their skin, in a sense, by listening to them and empathizing with them. And that's what C.S. Lewis did with respect to literature, is getting out of himself and getting in to the other person's perspective. So, there's a profound relationship, he felt, between literature and love.

He said, in the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus transcending our own competitive particularity. In coming to understand anything, we're rejecting the facts as they are for us. Yet, the primary impulse of each of us is to maintain and aggrandize himself.

But the cure for this is love. In love, we escape from ourselves into one another. And so, what he would do in reading literature is to suspend, as far as possible, his critical faculties and try to see the world in the way that the other person would see it.

And then, he could come back and approach, I suppose, in terms of an evaluation or literary criticism. But he didn't start with a critical mentality. So, if you would say that the whole thrust of the postmodern approach is a kind of perfect fear that casts out love, Lewis' approach was more of a perfect love or moving towards a perfect love that casts out fear, enables you to really see the world, see other perspectives in the way that they see them, before you respond to them.

In fact, I think a good rule in apologetics is to be able to state the other person's position to their satisfaction before you respond to it. Again, a good rule is to be able to state the other person's position to their satisfaction before you try to refute it. That means, often, that moves much more slowly.

So, you have to really listen and ask questions, not hostile, belligerent questions, but informative questions that allow you to understand the other person in a deeper way, to understand their view. Because it's very easy for us to put people in boxes and to immediately respond to what we think they might hold to, rather than really what they hold to. And you need to have a framework that's big enough to be able to really listen to people and then have confidence to be able to listen and then to respond later.

Sometimes, I know in discussions with people, I remember one young man I talked to. I talked with him for about three hours, more clarifying what he believed and asking questions, but not trying to push him anywhere, just listening. And then, at the end, I was able to go to the heart of his perspective and make very telling points that pulled the rug out from under his whole perspective.

But I had to listen for three hours to do it. Now, it may not take you three hours to be able to do that, but it does sometimes mean a while to be able to see the world a little bit in the way that the other person sees it. In fact, when people ask me questions about the faith, I will often stop and say, well, tell me some more.

Give me some more of your questions. I don't want to just deal with the first question. I want to really go to the root of the most important questions.

Let me understand how you see things. What's really at the root here? And then, if you find what's really at the root, you can go to a really important question, not just go, say, to a little leaf on the end of a branch on a tree, but you can go to the trunk or go to the root of the question. You often have to listen for a while before you do that.

Often, we're too impatient or too defensive in the way that we respond to people to really listen to where they stand. To summarize what I've been saying up to this point, imagination was the beginning of Lewis's conversion, an important dimension of his view of other religions and mythologies, and significant to his perception of the world. I've made some points with regard to its importance in apologetics along the way, but let me make one more point here.

People are along a spectrum from the open to the closed, and I would suggest this. Some people are very open, but relatively few people would take an hour to discuss things with you. You have to be pretty open to listening to do that, but many people are on a scale all the way along the way down to very closed, where you have a crack where you can get something in or say something.

I would give a rule of thumb here that the more open somebody is, the more direct forms of apologetics or communication you could use. You might actually be able to use some arguments that are out of your framework. It might be like taking a different club out of your golf bag.

It's not that we ought to club people, certainly not, but the golf club is for hitting for different distances. So you don't use a putter when you're going to go for a drive, or you're going to drive your golf ball or vice versa. You use a golf club that suits the distance that you have, and in a similar way, I'd say the more open somebody is, the more direct forms of communication you ought to use, and the more closed somebody is, the more indirect forms of communication you need to use.

Now I want to just illustrate a little bit the indirect forms of communication. I know later we're going to be reading one of my books, True Truth, and in there there's a chapter, When Arguments Fail, that particularly illustrates this more indirect form of communication, but let me just illustrate this. More indirect forms of communication are things like questions, riddles, parables, stories, short statements, things like that.

For instance, sometimes the best way of dealing with people, particularly people that are more closed, is to respond with questions, like Jesus was a master of this. In dealing with the Pharisees and Sadducees, often when they'd ask them a question, when they would ask him a question, he wouldn't always respond with an answer. I would say this, my rule of thumb is an honest question always deserves an honest answer, but some questions, especially questions that Jesus was asked, were not honest questions, and so he responded to those questions with a question, and sometimes I would find that a question can rattle around in somebody's brain longer than an answer.

In fact, sometimes it's better if people discover some things on their own than if you tell them or preach to them about it, so it's very helpful to learn the art of asking good questions. Questions, after you listen for a while, that go right to the heart of somebody's perspective. You don't have to feel like you have to do the whole job at once.

(52:37 - 54:19)
Sometimes a good question would be important, or sometimes I use little quotes. I remember one leader of the New Age movement that I met with, and she denied that there was any such thing as evil in the world, or that there was any such thing as sin, and I used a little quote from GK Chesterton that said, people have given up on the idea of original sin when it's the only doctrine of Christianity that can be empirically proven, and she laughed, and then I was able to use the illustration. She'd read a book by Scott Peck called People of the Lie, and we talked about the implications of that, the pain that's caused to people.

Scott Peck defined sin or evil as life-taking, not just literally murder, but sometimes taking life away from people. How when you criticize a kid, you can see their face fall, and they become a despondent or downcast. Jesus also did this with respect to parables, say the parable the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son.

Well, rational defenses are not to be ignored, and we'll talk about that, and historical defenses are also something that's important, but this whole bridge of literature and stories is important. Don't be afraid of myth, because we must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting in our theology. We must not be nervous about parallels in pagan Christ.

(54:20 - 56:21)
They ought to be there. It would be a stumbling block if they were not. If God is mythopoetic, perfect myth and perfect fact, then the gospel is addressed to the savage, the

child, the poet, in each one of us, no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.

Also, we need to realize that faith in Christ is comprehensive. That's part of the point of this talk, is to realize that faith in Christ addresses reason and imagination. Also, we'll talk more about experience and desire, personal practice, social practice.

It's not just the realm of reason alone. In fact, G.K. Chesterton put it this way, in his book Orthodoxy, a man is partially convinced when he's found this or that proof for a thing and can expound it, but a man is not really convinced of a philosophical theory when he finds that something proves it. He's only convinced when he finds that everything proves it, and the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked to suddenly sum them up.

The very multiplicity of proof, which ought to make reply overwhelming, makes it impossible. Or Lewis puts it this way, in his last line of a little essay called His Theology Poetry. He says, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not because I see it clearly, but because by it I see everything else.

There's a sense in which faith in Christ provides a way to put together the puzzle. Every religion and worldview has pieces of the puzzle because they live in God's world, but is there any puzzle that puts together the whole picture? Is there any key that unlocks the lock? If I had several keys on a keychain, could be I know that one of them is going to unlock the lock, but I have to try which one it is that does so. And what Lewis maintained is that faith in Christ was that key that unlocked the lock, that was able to put together all these different areas in a coherent picture.

(56:22 - 56:53)
Well, let's close in a word of prayer here and offer this time to the Lord. Lord, we thank you for this time where we can come together and wrestle with this whole idea of reason and imagination, and get a better insight as to not only how these things work together, but how to speak to others using both reason and imagination together. Help us to remember what Lewis said, reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.