

WHAT I LEARNED
in **Narnia**

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Thanks also go to my parents who saw to it that my brothers and sister and I grew up marinating in the Narnia stories. It seems in retrospect that I was brought up as a Narnian. And in watching our crazy world go by, I am tempted to wonder why I don’t need a green card to live here.

And of course, I should thank C. S. Lewis, a man who has had a greater influence on me than all the other authors I have ever read combined. I often find Lewis at the end of every train of thought, near the root of every tree. Debts are not discharged simply by acknowledging them, but gratitude, however feebly expressed, must still be expressed. I am profoundly grateful.



CHAPTER I

AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY IS INESCAPABLE. This means that people can use authority rightly or wrongly, but we cannot avoid altogether having people in positions of authority. In the same way, people can *submit* to authority rightly or wrongly (or to the right or wrong authority), but they will always be submitting to some kind of authority. Authority is something that God built into the world, and by right of creation He is the ultimate authority in it. But since humanity is sinful, we have many ways of either misusing authority or attempting to deny it altogether.

Before we see how Lewis handles the theme of authority in the Narnia series, let me tell a brief childhood story that illustrates fallen humanity's basic response to authority. One Saturday morning when I was about ten years old, I was for some reason having a great day—just feeling good about myself, the human race, and the world in general. As I was lying on the living room floor reading the comics, and filled with nothing but the milk of human kindness, I soon found myself thinking, “When I’m done with the comics, I’m going to surprise my mom by cleaning up the basement.” But just when I was pondering this (and feeling really good about myself), my mother walked

in and said, “Doug, I’d like you to go downstairs and clean the basement.”

And just like that, she had wrecked everything. The milk of human kindness miraculously drained away, and in its place was a little black rain cloud of rebellious mutterings. Now think about this for a moment—*why* did her command wreck my day? I was going to clean the basement anyway, so she was not interrupting any special plans I had made. What was the big deal? Just this: If I had done it by myself I would not have been under any authority, and I would have gotten all sorts of brownie points for doing it. But after she had told me to do it, I would merely be obedient by doing it. And it was no fun being obedient; I wanted to be a *volunteer*. I was kicking against the very fact of being under authority.

Now in discussing the theme of authority in the Narnia books, I want to divide the topic into two basic sections: characters who have twisted attitudes toward authority, and those who have righteous attitudes toward it.

False Authority

The Narnian chronicles contain many different characters who try to abuse authority in many different ways. But in the end, they all have one common thread. The root of all their problems is selfishness and grasping—the opposite of the biblical commands for leaders to be sacrificial and giving.

MIRAZ, *Prince Caspian*

In *Prince Caspian*, Miraz is a usurper. Before the narrative begins, we find out that he had killed Prince Caspian’s father, his own brother, in order to take power. Caspian knows nothing of this, having been very young when his

father was killed. So as long as Miraz doesn't have a son of his own, he is happy to raise Caspian and allow him to be the next king after him. But when his wife, Queen Prunaprismia (a wonderfully named woman) gives birth to a baby boy, Miraz decides to kill Caspian so his own son can succeed him. With the help of Doctor Cornelius, Caspian escapes and finally learns that Miraz is not the lawful king.

Now Lewis makes an interesting historical reference here: "When he [Miraz] first began to rule he did not even pretend to be king. He called himself Lord Protector" (59). If you remember your history, you might recall that in seventeenth-century England, there was a war between Parliament (led by Oliver Cromwell) and King Charles I. The king lost the war and was beheaded. Cromwell then took over and called himself *Lord Protector* instead of *King*. Now Miraz begins by calling himself Lord Protector, but later shows his true colors when he gets his followers to declare him king—essentially admitting that he has been the acting king all along and that he never had any intention of "protecting" Caspian's rightful claim to the throne. Not only does his selfishness and grasping drive him to murder, he also spins his words deceitfully to hide it. His "authority" is entirely false—he is nothing but a murderer and a usurper.

EUSTACE SCRUBB,

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the Scrubb family portrays another kind of abuse of authority quite different from the usurpation of Miraz and somewhat more trivial and silly in comparison. In a brief side comment, Lewis writes: "[Eustace] didn't call his father and mother Father and Mother, but Harold and Alberta" (3). In this case,

Eustace's parents are not grasping after authority; rather, they are throwing away the rightful authority they have as parents, making themselves peers of their child. To describe what is going on in this passage better, I'm going to use a big word for a simple idea: *egalitarianism*. Egalitarianism is the view that everything in society should be leveled—everyone should be exactly equal. Egalitarians believe that men and women, parents and children, bosses and employees, and everyone else are (or at least should be) at the same level in society. In other words, they have a problem with structures of authority. And what C. S. Lewis is making fun of in this passage is that type of thinking that wants to reject all authority—including that of parents—which is why Eustace talks to them like they are his peers rather than respecting their role as parents who are in authority over him.

JADIS, *The Magician's Nephew*

In *The Magician's Nephew*, Lewis contrasts two very different magicians with a common flaw: their abuse of a false authority. On the one hand we have Jadis, a sorceress and the last empress of Charn (who becomes the White Witch later in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). On the other hand we have Digory's Uncle Andrew, who believes himself to be a great magician but really does not understand the forces he is dealing with.

But Jadis and Uncle Andrew are both magicians. And in this book we see that Jadis and Uncle Andrew both believe they are "above the rules." They both believe rules are only for ordinary, common people. In this way, they try to put themselves above all authority but their own. They do not want anybody telling them what to do and they do not want any rules telling them what to do. The problem with this, of course, is that you should never trust

people who have strong views of authority when talking about people *under* them, but have very weak views of authority when talking about people *over* them. Whenever you encounter someone like that, you need to run in the other direction as fast and as far as you can—that person is going to abuse any authority they can get. One of the best things C. S. Lewis teaches us is that true authority can only be exercised by leaders who delight in submitting to authority themselves.

Jadis and Uncle Andrew do not do this at all. At one point Jadis says,

I had forgotten that you are only a common boy. How should you understand reasons of State? You should learn, child, that what would be wrong for you, or any of the common people, is not wrong for a great Queen such as I. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. We must be freed from all rules. Ours is a high and lonely destiny. (68)

So not only is she claiming to be above the rules, she also wants Digory to feel sorry for her because of it. “Ours is a high and lonely destiny”—not only does she demand obedience, she expects pity as well! The ironic twist in this passage is how it reveals that her noble-sounding act is nothing but common selfishness. When she makes this statement, Digory suddenly remembers that Uncle Andrew had used exactly the same words earlier: “Ours is a high and lonely destiny, my boy.” But, Digory thinks to himself, “they sounded much grander when Queen Jadis said them; perhaps because Uncle Andrew was not seven feet tall and dazzlingly beautiful” (68). What Lewis is saying is that no matter who you are—a seedy old man pretending to be a magician, or a beautiful seven-foot-tall queen—this “high

and lonely destiny” business is just a thin excuse for selfish ambition at the expense of others.

AHOSHTA, *The Horse and His Boy*

In *The Horse and His Boy* Lewis describes a very different type of bad authority from that of Jadis, but no less ugly. Recall that Aravis, the heroine of the story, runs away from her father’s house when she finds out that her father is going to force her into marrying a man named Ahoshta. Some time later in the story, we find out what kind of man this Ahoshta is. Lasaraleen, Aravis’s old friend, is scolding her for running away from the marriage when she says, “My husband says [Ahoshta] is beginning to be one of the greatest men in Calormen” (100).

But when we finally get to see this “great man,” what is he like? He is groveling on the carpet in front of his master, the Tisroc, and Rabadash the prince is kicking him in the rear end for saying the wrong things. So, on the one hand he is “one of the greatest men in Calormen,” but on the other he is a greasy, flattering, manipulating weasel. The authority that he wields—and he does wield real authority in Calormen—springs not from being a wise, strong man with real qualities of character, but from groveling, allowing himself to be abused, and playing the system through flattery. This is false authority as well as false submission. True submission never grovels, and true authority never accepts flattery.

SHIFT THE MANIPULATOR, *The Last Battle*

The Last Battle is many people’s least favorite book in the Narnian Chronicles, and while I can understand their objections, I think it has a lot going for it. Shift, the aptly-named ape, is one of the best-drawn characters in all the

Narnia stories, and he provides yet another example of misused authority.

Shift manipulates to get his way. He exercises authority by lies and trickery, all the while convincing his victims that he is only looking out for their best interests. For example, let's look at how Shift manipulates his so-called friend, Puzzle the donkey.

“Really, Puzzle,” said Shift, “I didn’t think you’d ever say a thing like that. I didn’t think it of you, really.”

“Why, what have I said wrong?” said the Ass, speaking in rather a humble voice, for he saw that Shift was very deeply offended. (4)

Now what is Shift doing in this passage by acting offended? He is manipulating Puzzle by creating false guilt. Have you ever seen someone moping around, waiting for others to feel sorry for him? (Maybe you have even done this yourself.) Perhaps this type of person wants pity, or perhaps they want to instill a false sense of guilt in someone, but the goal is always the same—somehow they want to get their way. There is something they want—maybe they just want to feel some kind of power over others—and they manipulate others’ feelings in order to get it.

That is just what Shift is doing here. He acts deeply offended because he knows that Puzzle has a tender heart, and he knows that this is one way to get Puzzle to do what he wants. Shift has completely turned the golden rule upside-down. Instead of “I will treat you as I want you to treat me,” Shift says, “Why don’t you treat me as I treat you?” (9). The difference being that Shift *really* means, “Why don’t you treat me the way I *say* I treat you (not how I actually treat you). And as long as I can convince you that I am acting in your best interests instead of my own, I will get away with it.”

When Shift succeeds at getting into power, his manipulations only get amplified as his audience grows. First of all, he dresses up, which is Lewis's way of highlighting Shift's deceitfulness. "The ape was of course Shift himself, but he looked ten times uglier than when he lived by cauldron pool, for he was now dressed up" (32). Lewis is saying that if you put royal robes on an ape, you don't have a king—you just have an ape in robes. In the same way, Shift dresses up his words to seem slick and sophisticated on the surface, but they are still nothing but ugly, grasping selfishness underneath. And not only that, but they are ten times worse than if he had not tried to cover them up that way.

But the real evil of Shift's authority is how he manipulates the Narnians' belief in Aslan to benefit himself. At one point he says, "Attend to me! I want—I mean *Aslan* wants—some more nuts" (33). This is one of the oldest tricks in the book for sinful leaders: once you get into power, take whatever you can from the people, but all in the name of a higher good. This higher good may be God, or patriotism, or humanistic brotherhood, or democracy, but what all such power-abusers really want is more power for themselves. Unlike Shift, they usually remember to say "the greater good of society requires this" instead of "I want this," but that does not make it any less ridiculous than saying, "Aslan wants more nuts."

THE DWARFS, *The Last Battle*

The final misuse of authority we will cover in this chapter is also from *The Last Battle*. Recall that near the end of the book, Iterion and the others liberate the dwarfs who have been enslaved and are being taken off to the Tisroc's mines. But how do the dwarfs respond to this liberation? You would think they would express gratitude and loyalty

to their savior, but they don't. They say, "We're going to look after ourselves from now on and touch our caps to nobody" (83). Now "touch our caps" is a sign of respect and deference to someone, a way of showing honor to authority. The dwarfs think that because they were enslaved once, all authorities must be slave-masters. So they are determined to shake off all authority. Their rallying cry becomes, "The dwarfs are for the dwarfs." They react against one bad authority by refusing to acknowledge any authority at all.

True Authority

All these characters we have discussed so far—Miraz, Jadis, Ahoшта, Shift, the dwarfs—either get their authority in wrongful, conniving ways, or selfishly abuse the authority they already have, or (most commonly) both. They are constantly asking themselves, "How much can I get? How much can I take?" Despite all the superficial differences among these characters, this is the one thing they all share. And this sort of pride and selfishness is, we might say, the root of nearly all other kinds of sin; like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we believe *we* are right and God (not to mention everyone else) is wrong. It also comes naturally to fallen human beings. Nobody has to teach kids how to grab a toy or bonk somebody else on the head; go into any nursery and you will see it happening within minutes. They are born knowing how to grab and how to want things for themselves. This is the basic problem that Jesus came to deal with, and it can be seen most clearly in how authority is wrongfully gotten and used.

We now turn to the Narnian characters who create a righteous contrast to all these bad examples of authority. And just as in our world we would begin this discussion

with the work of Jesus, in the context of Narnia we begin with Aslan.

But before we begin, I need to say something about the connection between Aslan and Jesus. C. S. Lewis was very adamant in saying that the Narnia books are not an *allegory*. An allegory is a book like *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the characters and their actions have a one-to-one correspondence to another layer of meaning. Think of an allegory as a two-story building—the first story is the actual narrative and characters, while the second story is the set of abstract ideas they represent. In *Pilgrim's Progress* the hero starts out with a heavy burden strapped to his back—this is the “first story” thing. In the “second story” of meaning, this burden represents his sins. Later in the story, the hero meets a giant who represents the sin of despair, and so on. One thing on the first story exactly represents one other thing on the second story, and the author typically makes the meanings clear.

Now C. S. Lewis maintained that the Narnian Chronicles were *not* like this. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between a character, object, or event in Narnia and some abstraction that Lewis wanted to teach us about. Instead, Lewis called these books “a great supposal.” Suppose there were another world like Narnia and suppose that God entered into that world in a way similar to the way he entered into our world—what would that be like? So, in general the inhabitants of Narnia do not have single, allegorical meanings. But Aslan obviously does fill the place of Jesus in this “great supposal.” He once tells the children that when they get back to England they will know him there by “another name.” At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we see a vision of him as a lamb, the Christian symbol of Jesus. In *The Last Battle*, when everything converges at a final judgment, it is again very clear that Aslan is Christ the Judge.

Just as in our world all true authority flows from Jesus Christ, so also in Narnia all true authority flows from Aslan. Aslan sets the pattern of true authority that his followers imitate, and the basic foundation of this authority, in direct contrast to the bad characters we have been reading about, is one of *sacrifice* and *giving*.

TRUE AUTHORITY IS SACRIFICIAL

In our natural frame of mind, we sinful humans tend to think that if you grab, you gain, and if you sacrifice, you lose. But what the Bible teaches, and what C. S. Lewis writes into the Narnia books everywhere, is exactly the opposite: if you grab, you lose, but if you give, you get. Authority flows to the person who sacrifices himself in order to give to others, but the person who tries to force authority away from others only ends up losing it. Imagine for a moment that you are a third-grade kid, and a fourth-grader walks up to you and says, “I want you to respect me and do everything I say, because I’m in the fourth grade.” The chances are pretty good that you would not do anything of the sort after hearing that, even if you might have before. Why? Because when people *demand* respect and authority, it runs away from them. But when they give themselves up for others, authority flows to them. You grab, you lose; you give, you gain.

Now suppose you walk into the kitchen the same time as your brother or sister, and you both reach for the plate with one cookie on it. You know the right thing to do is to give it up. But are you giving it up only in order to *get*? In other words, you might be thinking “Wait! Are you telling me that if I let her take the cookie now, then I get a cookie later?” Maybe you are hoping your mother will see your great act of kindness and bake you a dozen more on the spot. But no—in this case, your sister will get the cookie

and you will not. That sort of wooden interpretation is not the kind of giving-to-get that I am talking about here. And it is wrong because its expectations are far too *low*. The biblical lesson is that a giving pattern of life is going to yield many, many blessings that are much greater than all the small things you have given up.

God provides a clear example of this in Genesis 13. Abraham and Lot were both so wealthy in flocks and herds that “the land was not able to bear them” and fights broke out amongst their servants. So Abraham suggests that they part ways, and sacrificing his own preference, he tells Lot that he can have the first choice: “Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left” (v. 9). Lot’s response to this is not gratitude, but greed; he chooses the obviously better land that is lush and green (vv. 10–11). But it turns out that this land is right next to Sodom and Gomorrah, which are later destroyed by fire from heaven. So Lot, through his selfish grasping, got the better deal in the short term but was ruined in the long term. Abraham, meanwhile, took what appeared to be the worse option at first, but God blessed him much more richly in the end.

This principle comes to life again and again in the Narnia stories. What happens to Miraz? When he grabs for power, he loses it. What happens to Jadis? Her empire in Charn is destroyed and she makes her way into Narnia, where after a one hundred-year reign she is finally defeated and killed. What happens to Shift? He is thrown through the stable door and the evil Calormene god Tash eats him—one peck and he is gone. In the same story, the dwarfs are thrown through the stable door but they are blinded to the glorious place that is there—they are in heaven but

they make it a hell for themselves. Again and again, good things run away from people who *grab*, and good things (including authority) flow to people who *give*.

Aslan is, of course, the chief example and pattern of this principle, and he is just like Jesus in this respect. But the witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* only understands the grabbing kind of authority—if you want something, you take it. She does not understand Aslan’s kind of authority at all. What does she think when Aslan comes to negotiate Edmund’s release? Remember that Edmund had betrayed his brother and sisters, and because of that, even though he had been rescued from the witch, she has a lawful claim on him because he is a traitor. Aslan does not dispute the claim. Instead, he does something that is shocking and incomprehensible to all those who, like the witch, only understand the grasping kind of authority: He agrees to give himself in exchange for Edmund. This is because Aslan knows that the way to authority is through sacrifice. Even so, when Aslan fulfills his part of the agreement, it is very difficult for him. Just understanding the principle of sacrifice does not automatically make that sacrifice easy. When he goes to his death, he is so sorrowful that he allows Lucy and Susan to accompany him part way and provide some comfort and companionship.

When the witch sees Aslan coming, she believes she has triumphed. “‘The fool!’ she cried, ‘The fool has come. Bind him fast’” (151). All she understands is what Aslan calls the “deep magic,” which allows a traitor to be freed if another chooses to die in his place.

But after Aslan comes back to life, he explains the witch’s mistake: “‘It means,’ said Aslan, ‘That though the witch knew the deep magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know’” (163). The deeper magic is that love and sacrifice conquer hate and greed. Love and sac-

rifice create true, ultimate authority. So it is not just that Aslan died for Edmund as the perfect, substitutionary sacrifice for a traitor, thus saving him—though of course he did die in Edmund’s place and he did save him. There is more to it: After his death and resurrection, Aslan gains true authority. He had authority before, but after this it grows and changes in a glorious way.

But sinful people cannot understand this “deep magic.” You can explain it, read it from the Bible, draw it on a blackboard, and shout it at the top of your lungs, but a sinful heart cannot know this principle: *if you give, you get*. They just cannot get it into their heads—or rather, into their *hearts*. For they do not have an intellectual problem; they have a spiritual problem.

So Aslan’s authority springs from love and sacrifice. But this does not mean that his world is all sunshine and rainbows. Frequently the people whom he loves and saves find it to be very unpleasant at the time—Edmund certainly does. And his enemies ultimately experience his judgment, not his love. Earlier in the book one of the children asks, “Is Aslan safe?” To which Mr. Beaver replies,

Safe? Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the king, I tell you. (80)

He is good, but his kind of goodness is often unsettling and frightening—unsettling to Edmund and frightening to the witch.

TRUE AUTHORITY IS HUMBLE

All the villains mentioned so far—Miraz, Jadis, Uncle Andrew, Shift, and even Ahoshta, whose groveling is not anything like true humility—are proud and self-absorbed,

which goes hand-in-hand with their false authority. But Aslan is the pattern of true, sacrificial authority, and when he bestows this kind of authority on his servants, true humility comes along with it. Of course none of them are perfect—they have remaining sins and flaws—but they consistently exercise authority with true humility.

Consider the test of kingship that Aslan gives to Caspian.

“Welcome, Prince,” said Aslan. “Do you feel yourself sufficient to take up the Kingship of Narnia?”

“I—I don’t think I do, Sir,” said Caspian. “I’m only a kid.”

“Good,” said Aslan. “If you had felt yourself sufficient, it would have been a proof that you were not.” (206)

Aslan’s test is a test of humility. If Caspian had said something along the lines of, “Yeah, I’m ready—I’ve been ready for years but Miraz kept me from having it,” then it would have been obvious that Caspian was just another Miraz—proud, selfish, and grasping. But Caspian realizes the true nature of authority, which involves great personal sacrifice, and this realization produces humility. He admits he does not feel ready to take on such a burden, and paradoxically, that means he *is* ready.

I have had the opportunity to officiate at many weddings over the years, and this is one question that I think should be asked of every bridegroom at some point before the final vows: “Are you ready for this?” A good, honest answer, from a man who fully understands what he is getting into, should be “No!” And this, of course, means that he is well on his way to being ready.

Aslan gives a similar test in *The Magician’s Nephew* when he makes a London cabby the first king of Narnia. At first the cabby resists, saying he’s not the right chap for the job and that he never had much “eddycation.”

But Aslan asks him a series of questions about whether he could farm, rule the talking creatures of Narnia fairly, raise children to do the same, not play favorites, and in battle be “the first in the charge and the last in the retreat” (151–152). In the end, Aslan pronounces him ready.

Now clearly this is not a simplistic rule that we can apply willy-nilly to all aspects of life. Just because a fourth-grader does not feel ready for twelfth grade does not mean that he is, on some deeper level, *actually* ready for twelfth grade. He really is not ready, regardless of how he feels. But when someone is, in any part of their life, about to move on to the next level—whether it is another level of schooling, taking up a new sport, or learning a new subject, or moving out on one’s own, or getting married, or having children, or becoming a leader of others—then this test can apply, especially when people around you, people whom you respect, think that you should take that step. And if, on such an occasion, you find yourself honestly thinking “I don’t know if I can do this,” then that is a good sign. God has put you there for a reason. He wants you to take up the challenge, and He will give you the ability to do it.

In *The Horse and His Boy*, when Shasta (now known by his birth name, Cor) learns that he is to be the king of Archenland, he does not like the idea at all. And when Corin, his younger twin brother who would have been king if Cor had not turned up, discovers that he gets to be a prince instead of a king for the rest of his life, he is overjoyed. Now at first this does not make sense to us. Why isn’t Cor gloating about being king, and why is Corin not envious and bitter? The answer is that at heart, they are both servants of Aslan and as such they have humble hearts. But the main thing in this passage is that Cor does not at all grasp after the kingship:

“But I don’t want it,” said Cor. “I’d far rather—”

[King Lune replied,] “’Tis no question what thou wantest, Cor, nor I either. ’Tis in the course of the law. . . . The king’s under the law, for it’s the law makes him king. Hast no more power to start away from thy crown than any sentry from his post. . . .

For this is what it means to be king: to be first in every desperate attack and last in every desperate retreat, and when there’s hunger in the land (as must be now and then in bad years) to wear finer clothes and laugh louder over a scantier meal than any man in your land.”
(222–223)

Being king is not about sitting in a fine castle and ordering everyone to do your every bidding. That is the Tisroc’s idea of leadership, but not the Narnian or Archenlander view at all. The key point in this passage is that the king is the servant of law; the king is not above the law. And that applies before he even becomes king—if the law calls him to be king, he must not refuse. Just as a soldier sent off to guard duty has no right to abandon his post, so the one chosen to be king has no right to abandon his kingship. If you run away from your duty, you become a deserter.

King Lune’s speech also shows that it is the king’s responsibility to “take the hit” for his people, whatever the “hit” might be. Authority should not serve to cushion the king from the world; rather, it is the king who should bear the brunt of every blow. It is the same not just for kings and presidents and congressmen and other political leaders, but also for anyone who has authority—a husband for his wife, a father for his children, an elder or pastor for his congregation. If you are assigned a leadership role by God, then you step forward and you take up a bigger burden than anyone else. You ought not to say, “Well, now that I’m in charge, I’m going to order people around

so that I can relax.” That is the opposite of true, humble authority.

Authority and Obedience

So far we have talked about true and false authority in the context of the people who are in positions of authority. But what about those who are under authority? What is the right and wrong way to *respond* to the authority of others?

My favorite example of this in the Narnia stories is a short speech by Trumpkin the dwarf in *Prince Caspian*. At this point in the story, the army of Caspian and the Old Narnians is in a standoff with Miraz’s army, besieged at the great mound called Aslan’s How, and the Old Narnians are getting the worst of it. As they discuss plans for their final stand against Miraz, Caspian and his advisers decide to use the horn of Queen Susan which, when blown by someone in a desperate situation, will magically summon help. According to Doctor Cornelius it will be either Aslan or “Peter the High King and his mighty consorts down from the high past” (96). Now Trumpkin hates Miraz and is loyal to Caspian, but he does not believe in Aslan or the other ancient legends, including the magic horn—he thinks of himself as a practical fellow, and it is all just “eggs and moonshine” to him (96). But he is outnumbered and so submits to the council’s decision, asking them only to not tell the troops what they are doing, so as not to raise false hopes.

Then Doctor Cornelius tells the council that the help will come either to their camp, or to the Lantern Waste (where the four children first appeared in Narnia), or in the ruins of Cair Paravel. So they must send messengers to the two other places to find out if the horn brought help.

Again, Trumpkin is skeptical: “The first result of all this foolery is not to bring us help but to lose us two fighters” (97). Now Trumpkin has twice stated his complete disagreement with the council, but then he does a surprising thing—he volunteers to be one of the two messengers. His attitude takes even Caspian by surprise.

“But I thought you didn’t believe in the horn, Trumpkin,” said Caspian.

“No more I do, your majesty. But what’s that got to do with it? I might as well die in a wild goose chase as die here. You are my King. I know the difference between giving advice and taking orders. You’ve had my advice, and now it’s the time for orders.” (98)

This is a very important lesson on authority. Regardless of his complete disagreement with Caspian and the council’s decision, Trumpkin remains loyal to them and respectfully submits to their authority. There is a clear difference between *advice* and *orders*. It is the duty of everyone under authority to give their advice when asked, just as it is the duty of those in authority to carefully consider the advice of those below them. But at some point a decision must be made, and that is when those under authority need to be ready for orders. There is a time for advice, but when the time comes for obedience, life is very simple: obey. The lesson may be simple, but that does not mean the application of it is easy. This kind of obedience should not involve grumbling and foot-dragging. Obedience should be wholehearted whether you think the task is a good idea or not.

Many people today, in the grip of egalitarianism and individualism, react violently against this idea. The objection goes something like this: “How can you teach such mindless obedience? Do you want people to act like

brainwashed cult members? People should be individuals who think for themselves!” Of course, this objection is a very bad caricature of what we are talking about here, and another passage in *Prince Caspian* answers it by showing that even true loyalty like Trumpkin’s has limits. Earlier in the story, Nikabrik and his friends suggested to Caspian that they call for aid from the “dark” creatures of Old Narnia—hags, ogres, werewolves, and even (later on, in a different passage) the spirit of the White Witch herself. Trufflehunter the faithful badger quickly objects:

“We should not have Aslan for friend if we brought in *that* rabble,” said Trufflehunter as they came away from the cave of the Black Dwarfs.

“Oh, Aslan!” said Trumpkin, cheerily but contemptuously. “What matters more is that you wouldn’t have me.” (77)

In other words, Trumpkin is threatening to quit the army because he has a standard of right and wrong that is above Caspian. If Caspian tells him to go on a risky, long-shot mission, Trumpkin will cheerfully obey even if he thinks the mission is a bad idea, and he will do his duty as fully and valiantly as he can. But if Caspian orders him to do something that is not just a bad idea, but also *morally wrong*—like welcoming evil creatures into their army and fighting alongside them—then Trumpkin will refuse to obey.

And you should note that he has a good deal of credibility when he says this, because he is not refusing simply because he does not feel like obeying at the moment. On the contrary, we later on see him cheerfully obey orders that he personally disagrees with. Trumpkin is not at all a mindless slave who will obey Caspian’s every whim. He is an individual with a high standard of integrity, and he

submits to Caspian's legitimate authority while knowing that it can cross a certain line and become illegitimate. The key is the common standard of right and wrong that is above them both.

In the same way, we know that as Christians we are called to obey the civil government. We are to pay our taxes and follow the laws of the land, even though we might personally disagree with some of them. But this does not mean that the government can tell us to do anything it pleases. If politicians tell us that we must disobey God and, in Narnian terms, have fellowship with hags and ogres, then we must tell them *no*. We are to serve God rather than men in those cases where men tell us to do something that God clearly forbids, or not to do something that God clearly commands (Acts 4:18–19). However, our protests will carry a great deal more weight if we have already demonstrated that we are willing to obey the civil authorities on other issues, even when it pinches our personal convenience.

The Silver Chair provides another example of loyalty in someone who is under authority. Near the beginning of the book, Eustace and Jill are secretly flown to a “parliament” of owls in the middle of the night. The owls want to discuss how to help them find the lost prince Rilian and they are doing so without the knowledge of Caspian's government (recall that Caspian had just sailed away, and Trumpkin the dwarf was looking after things in his place). Eustace has been away from Narnia for several decades and is not quite sure what kind of gathering it is and whose side they are on, especially because of the odd circumstances of the meeting. He does not know the ins and outs of Narnian politics, but he knows where he stands, and his first words are a great testament to his character:

And what I want to say is this, that I'm the King's man; and if this parliament of owls is any sort of plot against the King, I'm having nothing to do with it. (53–54)

Eustace is quite willing to follow the advice of the owls, but he knows where his real loyalties are and he is willing to stand against the owls if they contradict those loyalties. Now, as it turns out, the owls are all quite harmless and all loyal to the king. They merely give their help in secret because the king had banned all Narnians from going on quests for the prince, since no one who had gone had ever come back. So Eustace had nothing to be concerned about, but it is still important that his first thought was how to preserve his loyalty to Caspian.

The last example I want to give in this chapter is also from *The Silver Chair*. Recall that Aslan gives Jill and Eustace a series of signs to follow in order to help them on their quest to find the lost prince. Through their squabbling and lack of faith and other failings, they “muff” all the first signs, and only by the goodness of Aslan do they get back on track and finally arrive at the place, deep underneath the ruined city of the giants, where they were to find the prince. Here they meet a knight who says he serves a great Lady. He seems good-hearted but also a bit empty-headed, as if there is something not quite right with his mind. He tells them he is under an enchantment which makes him go into a fit of violent madness at the same time every evening, so he has to be strapped into a silver chair so that he does not hurt anyone. Just to be sure, he makes the children and Puddleglum swear that they will not release him from the chair, no matter what he says or how much he begs them to.

Now the final sign Aslan had given Jill was that the lost prince would be the first person in all their journeying who would ask them to do something in the name of Aslan.

And as the knight is tied to the silver chair in his fit of madness, he finally gives them that very sign:

“Once and for all,” said the prisoner, “I adjure you to set me free. By all fears and all loves, by the bright skies of Overland, by the great Lion, by Aslan himself, I charge you [to release me].”

“Oh,” said the three travelers as though they’d been hurt. “It’s the sign,” said Puddleglum. “It was the *words* of the sign,” said Scrub more cautiously. “Oh what *are* we to do?” said Jill. (166)

For the knight is, of course, the lost Prince Rilian himself, and although he is continually under an enchantment, this “fit”—as his enchanted self calls it—is actually the one hour of the day that he is in his right mind. But Eustace and Jill and Puddleglum do not know this. They still think he is a raving lunatic, and when he speaks the final sign it forces them to make a decision. Should they obey the sign, release him, and risk getting slashed to pieces by a madman, or should they leave him tied up and assume that his calling on the name of Aslan was all just a mistake or coincidence?

“On the other hand, what had been the use of learning the signs if they weren’t going to obey them? . . .

“Do you mean you think everything will come right if we do untie him?” said Scrubb.

“I don’t know about that,” said Puddleglum. “You see, Aslan didn’t tell [Jill] what would happen. He only told her what to do.” (167)

Despite their confusion and uncertainty, the choice is really very simple. It is a matter of authority and obedience. Aslan himself gave them the signs, but he did not tell them that obeying them would keep them safe. They

can believe and obey—regardless of the consequences—or they can not believe and not obey. In the end, they make the right choice, even if it means possibly being killed by a lunatic. Of course, nothing of the sort happens—instead, by freeing Rilian from the chair they break his enchantment and set the story on the path to a happy ending. But they did not know that when they made the decision to cut him loose. Their faith and loyalty to Aslan came first, even if it meant sacrificing themselves.

Conclusion

Nearly every villain in the Narnia stories is a selfish grasper of some sort. They all try to clutch at authority, demand it from others, and force it upon themselves. In the end, however, authority flees far from them.

On the opposite side is the sacrificial authority of Aslan, who sets a pattern for all his followers by giving himself away. The world, like Jadis the White Witch, thinks this idea is completely foolish, but that is because it does not understand the “deeper magic” at work.

All the great heroes of Narnia follow this pattern—from Caspian to Cor and King Lune—and as they sacrifice themselves to be great leaders, they attract followers like Trumpkin who will sacrifice themselves to follow them. There is a certain authority in leading and a certain authority in following, but both share the same quality of *self-sacrifice*. Authority and submission are inescapable, but in the context of self-giving, they are liberating.

By learning this lesson and applying it deep down in your bones, you will always know the right thing to do. But without it, the world is a very dark and confusing place. The more you look at the world, the more you listen to what people on TV say, or maybe even what some

of your friends say, the easier it is to get muddled in your thinking. “What does it all mean? Whom should I follow? What authorities should I be submitting to? My friends all say such-and-such is cool, but I know my parents and teachers would not think much of it.”

At moments like these what you really need is the good, pungent smell of burnt Marsh-wiggle. Remember how Puddleglum became the hero of *The Silver Chair* when he stomped on the witch’s fire that was confusing his companions’ minds and making them doubt that Aslan or the whole world above ground ever existed?

Suppose we *have* only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. . . . Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours *is* the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. . . . I’m going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn’t any Narnia. (182)

Christians today desperately need this kind of faithfulness. When you are confused by the world’s way of thinking, you need to be the Puddleglum who will just be obedient and stomp on the enchanted fire that is drugging your mind and your soul.

True authority and submission is one of the great lessons of Narnia—not only how to rule without being a tyrant, but also how to *obey* without being a mindless follower or a slave. If you refuse to obey at all—if you grab for that authority for yourself and say, “I’m not obeying anyone but myself; I’m going to have that authority,” then you actually become a slave. But when you give it up, obey the authorities God has given you, and obey God Himself, He sets you free.