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The Dream of Narnia's Kings & Queens versus the Mirage of Edmund

J. Michael McKay Jr.

A common trope in storytelling is the young man or young woman who comes from humble beginnings and finds himself or herself to be a king or queen by the end of the story. As readers, we love observing the unfolding of their adventure and culmination to rule. Usually, these characters are sympathetic and good-natured; we would enjoy meeting them, befriending them, and we trust them to rule well. But what about a character who does not yet know they are destined to be a king and who has such deep character flaws that we recognize their rule would be a self-centered disaster? We neither like them, nor want to be near them, and we certainly do not want them to have authority over others. We have just such a scenario in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis.

Narnia's Dream for Benevolent Rulers

Edmund is one of the four Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve who by the end of the story is crowned co-ruler over Narnia with his siblings in Cair Paravel. However, as the story begins, Edmund has no idea that he will one day be a ruler of Narnia. As careful readers, we learn from Mr. Tumnus' conversation with Lucy that Narnia is expecting a day when Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve will come to that country. During Mr. Tumnus' confession to Lucy, he states "I had orders from the White Witch that if ever I saw a Son of Adam or a Daughter of Eve in the wood, I was to catch them and hand them over to her." Moments later even amidst his

fear of the White Witch, he confesses a faint hope that one day “the four thrones at Cair Paravel are filled – and goodness knows when that will happen, or whether it will ever happen at all.” In fact, Mr. Tumnus recognizes Lucy as a Daughter of Eve and only addresses her by that title throughout their entire initial conversation.

Later in the story, we learn more from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver as they entertain Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy. In a similar way to Mr. Tumnus, they always address the four as Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve in their initial meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver reveal their hope in the expectation that Aslan will return one day to defeat the White Witch, end the eternal winter, and install the two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve on thrones to rule over Narnia. Mr. Beaver states,

Down at Cair Paravel – that’s the castle on the sea coast down at the mouth of this river which ought to be the capital of the whole country if all was as it should be – down at Cair Paravel there are four thrones and it’s a saying in Narnia time out of mind that when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit in those four thrones, then it will be the end not only of the White Witch’s reign but of her life, and that is why we had to be so cautious as we came along, for if she knew about you four, your lives wouldn’t be worth a shake of my whiskers!

The Beavers’ fear of the White Witch is kept in check by their hope in the power of Aslan and in their hope of the future rule of the four Kings and Queens. Hope feeds their faithfulness and keeps their fear from fueling faintheartedness.

Edmund’s Mirage

During this informative luncheon, Edmund had vanished. Why? Because he was ignorant of his part in the true dream, expectation, and hope of Narnia’s Kings and Queens; instead, he had believed another story. This story was neither true nor even had a possibility of being genuine. This alternate story was told to him by the White Witch when he first entered

Narnia. Edmund had told the White Witch about his siblings while he was enjoying the drink and food of Turkish Delight that she had provided for him. Edmund was told by the Witch that she would make him her prince and then one day king. He would rule over his siblings with power and eat Turkish Delight all day. All he had to do was to gather his siblings and bring them to her.

In the story, Edmund demonstrates his poor moral character. He lies to Peter and Susan about the existence of Narnia; he betrays Lucy; he is unapologetic when he bullies and hurts others; he is greedy for Turkish Delight and in the thought of humiliating Peter when he is king. As good readers, we realize that Edmund would be a terrible ruler. Nevertheless, despite being an unsympathetic character, we do muster some sympathy for him as he slowly realizes that his dreams of Turkish Delight and being a prince (and ultimately a king) are merely a mirage; they are a *will-o'-the-wisp*; a shadow with no substance. When he enters Cair Paravel for the first time, he is without his siblings and discovers that the White Witch is cruel, unforgiving, and that all the promises she made were empty statements. His first meal is not Turkish Delight but stale bread which he can hardly choke down. Instead of being called a prince, he is called a brat. And instead of being crowned with a gold crown and bending his siblings to his will, he is ultimately a prisoner, tied up while walking to the Stone Table with the White Witch.

From Shadows to Substance: The Real Story

Edmund's story has strong parallels to humanity's story in the Bible. These parallels go beyond the titles of Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Humans were made by God in his image (Gen 1:26-28) which is defined as exercising governance over the created order. In short, while God is the great King, he has delegated to human beings to be vice-regents over his creation. This exercise of rule is illustrated in Genesis 2 where Adam and Eve are stationed in the Garden of Eden to work and to serve (Gen 2:15). However, the biblical story quickly reveals that Adam and Eve betrayed their God and proved unfaithful to the responsibilities he gave them. They believed another story, the serpent's story. This story told them that they

could govern themselves and be like God. In short, the serpent's story promised them a kingdom of their own; one that would not be subservient to God's kingdom. Involved in that betrayal is the taking of food that looked delicious. One wonders what the angels thought as they watched humanity become a rebellious unsympathetic character in God's story. How could humans rule God's good creation in light of this terrible betrayal of trust?

The end of the biblical story is just as important as the beginning for this theme of human rule. In the heavenly scene of Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV), the heavenly court sings about King Jesus and his vice-regents,

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,

For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

How is it that humanity's purpose could be reinstated? How can God have taken a people and made a kingdom which shall reign on the new heavens and earth? How can the original function of being human have been restored?

Once again, Edmund's story mirrors the biblical story. Edmund must be redeemed from the enslavement of the White Witch by Aslan's sacrifice for him so that he may rule subserviently under Aslan and alongside his siblings. As is well known, this is a picture of Jesus the Messiah's death for human beings so that they might be redeemed and so rule subserviently under King Jesus alongside their spiritual siblings. This is to fulfill their God-given responsibility to reign on the earth in service to the great King! This is no mirage. This is our future hope which fosters faithfulness as we live for the King today.