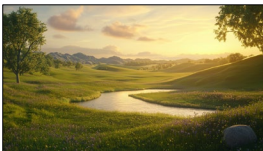


Get on the Bus

The Great Divorce Part 2: Losing

November 3, 2024



Today we're back on our journey through C.S. Lewis's The Great divorce.

Because, by dissecting his fictional people and places, we can get a sense of the actual Heaven and Hell – as long as we remember it's a metaphor and don't start thinking Jesus will be back with a bus to take you home. Lewis just uses the bus in our book to symbolize the simplicity of salvation – and the bus stop to represent God's open invitation to join Him in Heaven. Cuz as we read, it's located in the dreary and drizzly Grey Town, a picture of Hell where it's perpetually twilight and the ghostly residents have chosen to isolate themselves from each other as they sink into hopeless and hollow lives. And though the bus is always available for a free trip to Heaven, few choose to take it because familiarity seems to outweigh fear and frustration.

And as we discussed, this symbolizes our choice to leave the spiritual stagnation of life alone – to pursue the painful change of real life with God. And this is further illustrated in our story when Lewis and a few other ghostly Grey Towners board the bus but struggle to accept harsh reality of Heaven. Cuz there, things are vibrantly colored and always on the cusp of sunrise – but the landscape is so solid that leaves are too heavy to lift and blades of grass bruise their feet. And while people ponder whether they should stay, Lewis notices a group of radiant and powerful people approaching with thundering footsteps – scaring some enough to flee for the bus back home!

And that's where we pick up our story; facing fears. It's the ultimate unwanted and uncomfortable experience. In fact, that's fear in a nutshell, **the sense of something unwelcome approaching.** It's the detection of an imminent threat to something we value. But, since fear is our emotional instinct to defend something we want to preserve – we can get an intimate insight into our heart by asking the question: **what are you afraid to lose?**

In our story, Heaven feels frightening cuz when the Grey Town Ghosts left their old lives behind, they also left their control, comfort, and power. And as they see the challenge of the change, we see **Heaven is overwhelming because it exposes our insufficiency.** And we don't have to be in Hell to see that all our earthly efforts are also incapable of preserving any real control, comfort or power.

[Which is why Jesus explains:] Whoever tries to keep their life **down here** will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. [Up there! Cuz like Paul says:] – Luke 17:33 NIV

To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. [So, down here] – Philippians 1:21 NIV

I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ – Philippians 3:8 NIV

Cuz just like leaving one thing means nearing another, **losing one thing means gaining another!**

And as we *continue* our story, each of the next three chapters highlights *one* of our Grey Town Ghosts as they're *confronted* by *one* of Heaven's Solid Spirits and challenged to *change* by *letting go* of their Grey Town *attachments* and *embracing* their *new* life in Heaven.

But as *they* each *struggle* with the idea of *losing* the *control*, *comfort*, and *power* of their *old* lives, we see *ourselves* mirrored; because *our* **self-righteousness, self-satisfaction, and self-sufficiency** **keep us from fully surrendering our attachment to earth.**

And it begins in chapter 4 when the *Solid Spirits* pursue *individual Ghosts* – motivating *Lewis* to *seek cover* among some trees where he *overhears* a conversation between the Big Man he first met at the bus stop and a Solid Spirit who turns out to be Len, a former employee of the Big Man back on Earth. And as he tries to *convince* the Big Man to follow him *into Heaven*, it's revealed that Len had *murdered* a mutual acquaintance of theirs – making the Big Man *outraged* to see *Len* enjoying life in *Heaven*, so Len tries to explain:



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

‘No need to bother about it?! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?’

‘No. Not as you mean. I do not look at myself. I have given up myself.’”

And as the Big Man's anger *increases*, so does his *grip* on his *sense* of what's "*right*". Because by *his judgment*, Heaven has made a grave *mistake* letting a *murderer* in while *he* had to wait in Hell. And as *we* listen, *we* learn: **God's justice is challenging for the self-righteous!** Because *it's* based on a *bigger* picture that *we* can't see and it includes *mercy* and *grace* for *every* soul *willing* to surrender!

But like the Big Man, it's hard for *us* to *let go* of our *earthly* judgment because **being the judge gives us control!** It puts us *in charge* of what's "*right*" and allows us to *justify* ourselves; and without *that* control, *we're* *afraid* of unfair outcomes. But Jesus explains *why* we *need* to let go:

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. – Matthew 7:1-2 NIV



God's judgment is *perfect*, *ours* that has the flaw. And as seen with the Big Man, **it's not God's judgment that keeps us out of Heaven it's our own.** It's *our* near-sighted *pride* and shallow *lives* that make us throw *childish fits* when we should have *child-like faith*. Because when we *trust* in *God's* justice, there's '*no need to bother*' about *judgment*. Because:

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement ... He did it to demonstrate His righteousness ... to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. – Romans 3:25-26 NIV

When we *choose* to use *our* judgment we *punish* ourselves. But **letting go of our authority frees us from our self-righteousness!** Cuz when we *surrender* *our* control – we receive *His* righteousness.

But as the chapter *ends*, the Big Man's self-righteous *indignation* leads him to *reject* the Spirit's humble *invitation* and he *angrily returns* to the bus. *Meanwhile*, Lewis ventures *further in* to find a nearby *river* he'd been *hearing* – and when he *does*, he also discovers *another* Ghost in conversation with *another Spirit*. This time, it's the *intellectual* Ghost from the bus that he'd spoken with about *spirituality*. And as Lewis *eavesdrops*, we learn that the Ghost was an *Episcopal Bishop* named Dick back on *earth* – and the *Bright Spirit* had been his *younger* colleague.

And as they argue about *theology*, we come to understand the *Ghost* had enjoyed a life of *notoriety*, *book sales*, *speaking engagements*, *parties*, and a *lofty position* in church leadership all because *his opinions* gained widespread *popularity* on *earth*. And, as he *continues* to flaunt his *egotistical intellect*, he begins to *condescend* the *Bright Spirit* for *his* former beliefs:



“My dear boy, you were coming to believe in a *literal* Heaven and Hell!’ ‘But wasn’t I right?’

‘Oh, in a *spiritual* sense, to be sure. I still *believe* in them in *that* way. I am *still*, my dear boy, *looking for the Kingdom*. But *nothing superstitious or mythological...*’

‘Excuse me. Where do you imagine you’ve been?’

‘Ah, I see. You mean that *the grey town* with its *continual hope* of morning (we *must all live by hope*, must we *not?*), with its field for *indefinite progress*, *is*, in a sense, *Heaven*, if only we have *eyes to see it*? That *is* a beautiful idea.’...‘Now that you *mention* it, I don’t think we ever do give it a *name*. What do you call it?’ ‘We call it *Hell*.’”

[And like Isaiah warned:] Woe to those who call evil good and *good* evil ... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. – Isaiah 5:20-21 NIV

Because when we use *earthly approval* to *validate truth*, we’re *incapable* of seeing *beyond* this life. So, **God’s truth can be challenging to the Self-satisfied!** Because *absolute truth* isn’t built on *our opinions* – our *opinions* should be built on *absolute truth*. And that’s a big *obstruction* for the *self-satisfied* because **being given the truth prevents us from taking any credit!** And our ego *feeds* on approval because **being validated gives us comfort**. And *without* that comfort, we’d have to live in *fear* of the *unknown*. The problem *is*, being “right” in our own eyes, *blinds* us to the possibility of *higher truth*. So we’re *told* to get our *approval* from a higher *perspective*:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your *own* understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. – Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

And unfortunately, the Intellectual Ghost illustrates the *answer* to Jesus’s *question*:

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? – Mark 8:36 NIV

No good. Cuz we’re *slaves* to who we *obey*, and when *our master* is *our own mind*, we sentence ourselves to the *lesser* life apart from God’s *higher truth*. But **letting go of our approval frees us from our self-satisfaction!** Cuz when we *submit* to someone *superior*, we *accept* a higher *standard*!

But, *unwilling* to surrender *his opinions*, this Ghost only *pretends* to *ponder* and leaves for the bus.

Which takes us into the very short chapter 6, where Lewis *arrives* at a beautiful *waterfall* beyond his *previous* powers of perception – though *now* it seems that his eyes are *adjusting* to take in *more* of Heaven. And as he *marvels* at his ability to see the waterfall as *a whole* – he notices another *Grey Towner* shuffling through the trees, trying to *take* some of the fallen *apples*. But, as he *struggles* to carry just *one* apple, the *Waterfall* speaks to him:



‘Fool...put it down. You cannot take it back. There is not room for it in Hell. Stay here and learn to eat such apples. The very leaves and the blades of grass in the wood will delight to teach you.’

And in this scene, it’s plain to see what we’ve been learning from the start: **Heaven and Hell are mutually exclusive.**

The things that *God* gives have no *place* in *Hell*, and the things of *Hell* have no value in *Heaven*. And since *His presence* is His biggest *gift*, **God’s grace can be challenging to the Self-sufficient.** Because when we *accept* His *help*, we have to *admit* our *need*. And we have to *concede* that **everything we value is ultimately worthless when apart from God:**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that *no one* can boast. – Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV

Self-sufficiency gives us a *false* sense of *security* because it *allows* us to believe we can *save ourselves*. So we *lean* on our ability because **taking command gives us power.** It puts everything in *our hands*, on *our terms* cuz without that power, we’d always be afraid of *something* being *stronger*. Problem is, **aiming our efforts at this life only weighs us down.** And we look as foolish as *this Ghost* proving he’s *weaker* than an *apple*! Heaven’s reality *cannot* be *possessed* by our *power* – only by our *surrender*. So **letting go of our ability frees us from our self-sufficiency!** And *that* allows us to rely on *God’s* ability to provide the *power* only He has – to *save* and *sustain* us.

But, rather than *accepting* Heaven’s *help*, our *apple* Ghost defiantly continues *torturing* himself with the *ignorant* belief that *he* has the power to use *God’s* gifts *outside* of *God’s* will. And as his unending *struggle* fades from Lewis’s view, our chapter comes to a *close*. But *just then*, for the *first* time, *somebody* speaks directly to *Lewis* and *asks* if he wants to go home! **Dun Dun Dun!**



And again we’re left with several *real-life* insights from the story *so far*:
1. **Self-righteousness, self-satisfaction, and self-sufficiency are all forms of self-deception!** Cuz just as the *Grey Town* Ghosts should see *their* need to surrender when confronted by *superior* Spirits – we must admit that *on our own*, we have no *power* outside *this place*! And

2. **You have to let go of yourself to receive your real life.** We gotta let go of our earthly sense of *authority*, *approval*, and *ability* to receive *God’s* *greater* gifts; because

3. **Real freedom comes from having nothing to lose!** Fear *only exists* when our *control*, *comfort*, or *power* is threatened – so *letting them go* is what *transforms* from *fear* to *freedom*! But we’ll only *surrender* once we *trust* that the life *God* wants to give is *bigger* and *better* than the one we know.