

“DO TAKE IT PERSONALLY”

(Narnia 11)

Luke 4:14-21 (p. 995)

As we learned last week, the arrival of Father Christmas marked the beginning of the end for the White Witch’s spell. And while it was obviously an occasion for rejoicing, it was clearly not to be taken lightly. Indeed, Father Christmas pointed out that the presents given to mark this solemn occasion were tools – not toys. But even as Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and the children were enjoying a hot meal, there were others in Narnia who were not at all happy – and with good reason.

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 11

One of my most vivid memories of childhood is of the insufferably hot late-summer afternoons in Central Washington where, when the conditions were right, massive thunderclouds would sometimes gather overhead. And as I watched the dark gray underbellies of those clouds, I would occasionally see a flash of lightning. And then, fancying myself a young scientist who knew the difference between the speed of light and the speeds of sound, I would gauge its distance by counting the seconds until thunder shook the skies.

One of my favorite (admittedly childish) games during such a storm was to stand on the front porch, waiting for the lighting. The moment it flashed, I would spread my arms and in a voice as close as I could come to approximating Charlton Heston’s, I would cry, “*Thunder, come forth!*” And, of course, the skies would always oblige – to my great delight.

It’s easy to amuse yourself when you’re a bored six-year-old on a hot summer afternoon. Now I’m sure I was never fully convinced. But I will admit that there were times when I really wanted to believe that somehow, if only for perhaps a split-second, I had managed to bring the forces of nature under my control.

We can’t do that of course. If you’ve ever been caught in a real flood, or witnessed a hurricane, or stood at the ocean’s edge in a storm, you know how powerless we really are. But that doesn’t stop people from playing those childish games. Take the Witch, for example. If there is one lesson in today’s chapter it is that you cannot stop the spring. You can fight it. You can curse at it. You can pretend it isn’t so. You can even threaten to kill anyone who disagrees with you

(which is exactly what the Witch did). But once it has started in earnest, you cannot stop the spring.

Of course, we know the deeper truth here in our story. Even as the Witch was reminded by her cheeky dwarf – this was Aslan’s doing. Do you remember the old rhyme that Mr. Beaver recited to the children? *“Wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight; At the sound of his roar sorrow will be no more; When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death; And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”*

I think it must have seemed something like that long-anticipated springtime in Narnia when Jesus came preaching in Galilee. Luke says that he came in the power of the Spirit, announcing that the year of the Lord’s favor had finally arrived. What’s more, Jesus made it perfectly clear that **he** was the long-awaited Anointed One whom God had sent. Every head turned. Luke says that news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. Some welcomed him gladly. Others did not. But welcome him or not, he had come. And nothing that anyone could do would change that fact.

Sadly, the very people you would think would welcome him most readily – his friends and neighbors from his hometown of Nazareth – were the ones who rejected him most viciously. In fact, if you follow today’s lesson to the end, you discover that, following the incident in the synagogue, they hustled him to the edge of town where they intended to stone him to death for his blasphemy.

Jesus came to them like the spring, saying, *“Ready or not, here I am.”* Some were ready. Some were not. In the prologue to his Gospel John reminds us of that same truth. This is what he wrote concerning Jesus: *“He came to his own, but his own received him not. Yet to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

Do you realize that it is every bit as true today as it was then? We encounter Jesus and we have to decide what we are going to do with him. It’s really that simple. Now, I’m sure I could make this sermon a whole lot more complicated. But I agree with C. S. Lewis who wrote, *“The process of living seems to consist in coming to realize truths so ancient and simple that, if stated, they sound like barren platitudes.”*

The bottom line is really just this. Even as you cannot stop the spring, so you cannot stop the coming of Jesus whenever and wherever he wills. It’s very possible that today, right now, Jesus might be coming to you and saying, *“Ready or not, here I am. You can come with me and discover that I am the way. You can take me at my word and learn that I am the truth. And you can live forever with me and know that I am the life. You can accept or you can reject me. It’s your choice. But choose you must.”*

C. S. Lewis put the matter this way in his book *Mere Christianity*: *I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let's not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*

Now, it would be an understatement to say that Jesus “upset” those people in his home church by speaking the truth plainly and simply. In fact, when you look at the dialogue objectively, Jesus made his case that day with little tact or diplomacy. Many of those who listened to him that day became violently angry – angry enough to kill him. (That is not a pleasant experience – especially in church.) You can see the ugliness of their anger mirrored in the closing line of our chapter today: *“If either of you mention that name again he shall instantly be killed.”*

Sometimes a person will have the temerity to speak the plain truth and then, realizing that they may have been too blunt or their listeners too sensitive, they might add a phrase such as “no offense” or “don’t take it personally” to soften the effect. Jesus didn’t do that. I don’t want to do that, either – and I don’t believe in this case that I should. But I do want to be quite clear about what I’ve said today concerning Jesus. You have a choice. You can reject him or you can worship him. That’s it. Now, I hope that you don’t take offense. But I pray that you **do** take it personally.