

# ***THE STONE TABLE, ISAIAH 53***

A Narnia Christmas #4

◆ **Intro:** One of the most profound images in The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe is that of the stone table. We saw earlier that the White Witch's claim on the traitor, Edmund, illustrates how sin owns us and makes us owe our lives. By rights of the law, a traitor would be executed at the Stone Table, just as the Bible teaches that by law of a holy and perfect God, anyone who sins must die, for he cannot permit anything less than righteousness to last. But in a surprising twist of events, Aslan the lion, who could've easily killed the Witch at any time, agrees to take Edmund's place, so the boy can go free. [SHOW clip OF ASLAN MOUNTING STEPS]

◆ In the dark of night, he meets the witch and her hags, trolls, beasts at the Stone Table, where he willingly allows himself to be bound and muzzled, kicked and mocked and his great mane shaved. Lucy and Susan watch horrified from the shadows as the Witch draws a dagger and finishes Aslan off.

◆ **1. Aslan's death on the stone table is the story of Christ's death on the cross.**

◆ What was going on at the stone table is what was going on Good Friday. What we have in the cross **is a display God's infinite love**. Jesus was taking the place of every person who would ever believe in his name, and accept this gift. Aslan's sadness on the afternoon before his death suggests Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup may pass from him. The binding, shaving, and vilifying of Aslan, suggest the arrest, beating and mocking of Christ.

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◆ Aslan was taking the punishment that belonged to Edmund, just as Jesus was taking the death that everyone of us deserves who ever put a little pink toe across a line God has drawn.

◆ *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23, NIV.*

◆ **A.** Theologians call Jesus’ sacrifice vicarious atonement, or substitutionary atonement. But it’s no simple discussion as to why Jesus’ sacrifice is the answer to the problem of sin in the world. Just so we’re not confused, I should remind us that Aslan was not paying off the White Witch. She may be the hatchet man for traitors and law breakers, but the law in Narnia, called “deep magic” in the story, was made by the Emperor Beyond the Sea. Aslan was satisfying the Emperor’s law. Likewise, sometimes people think that Satan owns us and Jesus had to pay Satan off to get us out of our eternal jail. That is not really atonement so much. That’s more a theory of a ransom paid the Devil. But that is not it, you see. The Devil does not own you. The Devil will suffer the same fate as any sinner. Our trouble is that our sin puts us at odds with God! It is God’s law, and God’s wrath, and God’s deep desire and insistence on holiness, righteousness, and all that is good, that must be satisfied. Jesus was not paying the devil, he was paying his father, God.

◆ **B.** And that raises the stakes quite a bit. You see, Aslan and the Witch were not equal adversaries although she pretended it was so. And God and Satan are not either. No. We have a much bigger problem: the one we need for life is both the one who wants to give it to us, and the one who must destroy us. What a troublesome problem! See, the ransom theory

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puts us on the side of the loving Father out to rescue us from the evil kidnapper, the Devil. One hates us. But the other loves us. If we but stay by the one who loves us all is safe. In reality it is not so simple. God is both: the one who loves, and the one who must punish sin by his very nature. Which accents one very important situation: *there is no where to flee to get away from the problem of being a sinner.* There is no merely loving, old man at the end of life giddy just to welcome you out of your earthly hardships.

◆ No, God is a warrior trained to destroy all evil, which we have on us! A fire that ignites in the presence of sin. Put it like this: God's holiness is the spark on your gas stove, and our sin is the gas. Put them together and there is burning. What we need is a way to live in the midst of pure, flaming beauty. So you see, sinfulness isn't so simple.

◆ Back to our story. Aslan could just kill the Witch outright, but by the law of justice, Edmund would still have to die. Still have to face his just deserts. So in the greatest expression of love, Aslan dies for him. He is the father who jumps in a frozen pond pushing out his daughter, but drowning himself. He is the young man who pushes his younger brother out of the traffic, but gets hit by the car himself instead. They do not both live. One of them dies. He is not a superhero undaunted by speeding tons of steel. Christ took the full shot-gun blast that was aimed at us. That is infinite love. He is the Elsa's sister in the Disney film Frozen, who out of love would take her last breath to shield her sister from the sword. (Or, in another way, he is the

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snowman Olaf, willing to melt to drag frozen Anna toward the fire.) These are all Christ-acts. We call them vicarious acts. Substitutionary acts.

◆C. This love of which I speak today is deeper still. So that we appreciate it, bear in mind that Christ did not lay down his life for us because we are so lovable. He laid down because he is loving. You may be a fine specimen of female beauty, or a mature, high-achieving male. But that is not why Christ was born to die. Christ did not die for you because you have been good the required number of days, or because you are faithful, or because you finally gave in and believed. Christ died to make you all those things, which you were not.

*◆But then God our Savior showed us his kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:4,5, NLT).*

◆We might assume we're the object of God's love because there's something inherently adorable or good or endearing about us that God finds irresistible. But, while we do bear his image, we must see it otherwise.

◆ God's love is a self-determining love! That's what makes it so secure! It is on a par with cleaning up after your baby has released its lunch all over itself, you, your room, and furniture. You think very much that you might do the same, but you clean it up because you are the parent. You love, you care. Your teen is unresponsive, and rude to you -but undaunted, you will love her (it is not her cuddliness that creates your love for she is everything but this at the moment).

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◆“Christ did not die for men because they were intrinsically worth dying for, but because He is intrinsically love, and therefore loves infinitely.” -Lewis

◆*Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:7,8, NLT).*

◆It is God’s nature, not ours, that binds him to us. And this my friends is why our hearts do not need to doubt when we fail, or to give up when we have loused up. It is not that we have gotten through the week morally that causes God’s love to pursue us! Let your jaw drop to the floor in awe. Sometimes we have not thought deeply enough about the Christ of Christmas to even love him much at all. We tell ourselves we are forgiven and then cuss at people we love. We say Jesus came to save and then live like very dead people.

◆[The following is an exercise in pondering Christmas love. Write a note to God on one of the red strips of paper in each row. Isaiah says “by his stripes we are healed.” He took the cut, the nail, the whip that we deserve. You are invited to respond on the blood red paper. We’ll use them later in our worship time.]

◆Now let me tell you a bit more of the story of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe...

◆**2. Aslan’s return to life is the story of Christ’s resurrection.**

◆ After a long night of weeping at the death of Aslan, the girls are standing at the edge of the hill of the Stone Table and the sun is rising. Suddenly

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they hear the sound of a great, deafening crack. Turning they see the stone table has split and Aslan is gone!

◆[SHOW CLIP OF STONETABLE.]

◆They can hardly believe they are seeing this. They throw themselves on him and smother him with kisses and ask what this all means. Aslan explains:

◆“Though the witch knew the deep magic, there is magic still deeper which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have know that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards!” p.158-160

◆Are you seeing our text in the story? Isaiah 53 said...

◆“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and

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prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.” Isaiah 53:7-11, NIV.

◆ This is Easter resurrection, The empty table/tomb is a display of God’s infinite power.

◆ B. But this too, is no small deal. Why is a resurrected Christ so important? Why couldn’t Christ/Aslan just die for us and be dead, while we go on with life? Well, just before the final blow the witch taunts Aslan “When you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well? (Edmund, for whom he was giving his life.) You have lost your own life, and you have not saved his.” A good observation. A dead savior is not all that much of a lasting help. Thus the importance of resurrection!

◆ *but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them...He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (Hebrews 7:24,25,27 NIV).*

◆ Christians do not worship a dead prophet or a by-gone savior. Christ is a present, living being, and importantly so. God, by nature, is eternally against our sin and evil, just as he is also eternally in love with his human creatures. He comes to us with compassion, but also with complete justice. That’s why the resurrection of Christ is so important. Not only does he die for our sins, he lives to eternally keep us in pure relationship with the Father. A dead savior cannot keep sin at bay, or the wrath of God that will

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always destroy sin. So a living Christ is our eternal shield, as well as our eternal connection.

◆ *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Romans 5:10*

◆ Put it another way: because of sin, the sky is falling but Christ always lives to hold it up.

◆ *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:3, NIV).*

◆ **Conclusion:** In *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Aslan shows us both

◆ 1) the infinite love of God who would trade places with us rather than let us die, and

◆ 2) the infinite power of God that would forever keep us in a living, righteous relationship with himself. Because of Jesus we have more than just the end of death. We have death working backwards, in other words, creation of life!

◆ We will celebrate the Lord's Supper today. Communion. As we do so, remember that we are not here to mourn in bitter-sweet memory a gesture of love that once was, so impressive, and so long ago. We are here to celebrate a love that is and will never end!