

That Hideous Lecture: The Severed Head

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[0:00] The main message is, and so the title of tonight's conversation is just that hideous lecture, the severed head. And we're going to talk about, really talk about hierarchy. The thesis tonight is, this is in the listening guide. Hierarchy is not a disease our age takes it for. It is the shape of love.

It's the shape that love has to take among creatures of equal worth and unequal function, where honor runs up and provision runs down, and every superior owes more than he gets. And hierarchy dies two ways, the head that abdicates and the head that usurps.

The head that abdicates is the one that lets its position go, neglects its position, doesn't take it seriously, doesn't take it manfully. And then the one who usurps is the one who takes a position that's not theirs, doesn't belong to them.

And that's going to be the main theme that we see throughout this book. We really have turned, as a society, the word hierarchy into a bad word. We distrust it. We feel guilty about it.

We tear it down over and over again. And then we are surprised when nobody is looking after anybody else. Lewis is famous for talking about men without chests, which is sort of an individual take on we remove all of the engines of nobility and goodness out of a man's soul and then expect them to be courageous and noble and so forth.

[1:31] A society that has said no to hierarchy is a society that's removed its chest. It's a society that's literally removed its capacity to be kind and care and to express honor amongst many other things.

So tonight we're going to pull the word hierarchy out of quarantine and we're going to use the old catechism, Westminster catechism a little bit to discuss about superiors and inferiors and equals and what the apostles meant when they talked about the head and the body.

And also what occurs in a marriage when the head fails, which I think is one of the big issues that the novel is handling. That hideous strength is thought to be about science fiction or about a severed head or about Merlin or about a bear.

I think it's fundamentally just about when social structures designed by God break down and what that looks like and how it happens.

Now, tonight, especially tonight, I want to give you a little bit of an insight into the life of C.S. Lewis because some of his, the waters that he was swimming in and his own childhood experiences are far more prevalent, in my opinion, in his work than we realize.

[2:47] The basic idea is that he grew up in Belfast. He was Irish and the hierarchy in Belfast was very, very important. He was from a family that would not be described as aristocratic. There was no inheritable right to, you know, a position or station, but he was high enough up in society.

His parents were where for him, the way to climb socially, socioeconomically would be to just get a really good education.

We're living in a time, Lewis is living in a time when access to the right school could overcome a lot of lack that you had in terms of heredity and all that kind of stuff.

So Lewis's mother died when he was nine. He has an older brother named Warnie. We'll probably talk about him in future conversations. Lewis's dad was a good guy, but when his mother died, he was grieved and anxious and really had trouble sort of just owning his role as father when his mother died unexpectedly.

Obviously, obviously leaving Lewis behind with a huge hole in the family, but also with a dad who maybe wasn't always firing on full cylinders. Again, the expectation for this particular class of family would be to get these kids into a series of preparatory schools where they could eventually emerge into the upper class in Oxford or something like that.

[4:22] And so the dad has this decision to make. He's got to choose a school for his kids. And his son, Lewis, is nine. He chooses a school that is, as it turns out, just not a good fit.

Not a good fit is probably not the right way to say it. Just weeks after Lewis's mother dies, he is shipped across the ocean to a small English boarding school that Lewis's father had just found to be an easy choice because it was available.

It was there. And unfortunately for Lewis, he winds up under the leadership of a man named Capron, who, again, is not a bad man, but is certainly past his prime and not really serving functionally as the head of that school any longer.

As I've read Lewis over the years, I think it's pretty likely he was abused. I think it's 100 percent likely he was physically abused and may have also been abused in other ways at this school.

This was a school that was, you know, inmates running the asylum, all sort of being overseen by a man who everyone would have thought of as nice and kind, but he was just no longer functioning well as the head of the school.

[5:44] So Lewis has some of his darkest and most scathing words for this experience in this particular school when he was young. Eventually, Lewis outgrows that school and it's time to move on.

And so he moves on into the care of a man named Kirkpatrick. This is the man that he and his brother universally respected.

They called him the Knock. His nickname had been for years, Knock, and they called him the Great Knock because they really pointed at this man as the guy who saved their intellectual trajectory, helped them to become men, and so forth.

So Kirkpatrick had previously been Lewis's headmaster, Lewis's dad's headmaster, and he was an older man and had retired. And so he would take young men into his home around 16 to prepare for exams to get into one of these fancy colleges.

And so Lewis arrives at Kirkpatrick's door and has a funny story that sort of sets the tone for their whole relationship. He shows up on a train and he says to the Great Knock, oh my goodness, this area is far more wild than I expected it to be or something like that.

[7:10] Just some kind of making conversation kind of thing. And Kirkpatrick is not the kind of guy you make conversation with. He's the kind of guy you say true things to that you mean, understand, and have capacity to articulate.

And so initially Lewis is just absolutely trashed by this Kirkpatrick, by the Great Knock, because the Great Knock just keeps asking him questions. And he would say over and over again, what do you mean?

What are you talking about? And on what basis are you forming this opinion? And have you been to this area before? And Lewis is literally just trying to say something, you know.

And essentially in that moment, Lewis realizes, I make a lot of noise and not a lot of sense. And he's humbled by this man who is not nice, but kind.

And that's going to be a prevailing theme throughout that hideous strength. The difference, the wide-ranging difference between nice and kind is, if you've read the novel, it's huge.

[8:11] We live in a kind of long-housed society that emphasizes niceness as kindness. And so it's important for us as men to understand that the way that the world would tell us whether we're being kind or not is not a reliable method.

We have to think more deeply about what kindness actually is and pursue it, not niceness. So Kirkpatrick is actually the hardest man that Lewis has encountered so far.

He's also the most competent and the most kind because he actually believes that Lewis should say real things, take his mind under control, not just make noise.

And in some sense, Lewis's first encounter with a man who was actually an effective head was this man named Kirkpatrick.

Okay. So that's the world of Lewis's youth. And not long after that, he's a World War I veteran, as was, you know, most people in that generation, most men in that generation.

[9:19] So not long after this, he's also getting, you know, exposure to what I think a lot of us would consider to be just one of the absolute most brutal experiences possible in the last hundred plus years.

More than a hundred years now. Wow. Anyway, before we go further into the story, though, I want to talk about how everyone in that time was thinking about hierarchy, headship, leadership, et

cetera.

Because the world that they were living in, it's very different than the world we're living in. So I need to talk a little bit about the Westminster Catechism, this massively influential document that really shaped England in many respects.

Had probably its most elegant passages. It's its most I think its most impactful passages in the whole catechism handle Exodus 20, fifth commandment that you should honor your father and mother so that you may live long in the land.

One of the questions initially in the Westminster larger catechism says by father and mother in the fifth commandment are meant not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts, especially such as by God's ordinance are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church or commonwealth.

[10:47] This is in the listener's guide at the very bottom. If you want to read along with me. So one of the first things it does, it says that this command to honor father and mother is not simply specifically aimed at father and mother, but it's categorical in nature and applies to superiors, inferiors and equals in different ways and conveys responsibilities for all of those sort of tiers.

As for the general scope question 126, the general scope of the fifth commandment is the performance of those duties, which we mutually owe in our several relations as inferior, superiors and equals.

So there it is. It just says it point blank, something we would not say today without the slightest hesitation, inferior, superiors and equals. The catechism gives a full account of social existence and says it is hierarchical by nature from the top to the bottom and honor and obedience go upwards while love and provision go downwards.

Justice operates horizontally. Justice operates horizontally. And he talks about the expression of several relations, the duties that are owed in a specific way, not in a general way.

You owe one person a specific thing because of their station, because of what they are to you, what they do and so forth. And it's really this whole web of duties and obligations built around our social stations.

[12:16] That's the world that Lewis grew up in. The catechism doesn't idolize or idealize the obligation to superior officers. It doesn't make the mistake of saying, listen to the people who are over you there.

It gets way, way deeper than that. But for now, I think it's important to understand that we live in a collectivist mentality that would say that we're all essentially the same and that we're swappable.

And that we're essentially just economic units of production. And of course, in a deeply Marxist or communist society, we literally would just be like, you, grab a pitchfork. You're a farmer now.

You know, are you good at farming? Does not matter. That's not how we think about things. We just think about labor increments. So that's full blown equality on a collectivist or Marxist scheme.

This is a hierarchy where God has deposited his gifts in people and they are sometimes the superior and sometimes the inferior, depending on particular circumstances and so forth.

[13:23] So question 127 in the catechism. The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is all due reverence in heart, word and behavior, prayer and thanksgiving for them, imitation of their virtues and graces, willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels, bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love so that they may be an honor to them and to their government.

For superiors, what's required of superiors, question 129. And so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.

In other words, they have a ton of responsibilities, including a responsibility to their position so that future inhabitants of that position will be able to engage in that superiority role in a way that isn't, you know, full of scandal and besmirching and so forth.

So you can think about like my job and ask like, OK, I'm I fill a category. Right. And a bunch of other people have filled this exact same category.

And so amongst all the things that all the people in my category owe, one of them is to keep this category pure for the next guy who has to fill it. So that he's not dealing with sort of the noise pollution of that, you know, contamination of this other guy.

[15:13] So you can see like this is just a very thoughtful, extremely intricate. It will not go on a bumper sticker along with a coexist sign like it just it just defies oversimplification.

And it defies this call to equality. We're going to talk quite a bit about that. And then it goes into sins of the superiors. Sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of duties required of them, an inordinate seeking of themselves, their own glory, ease, profit or pleasure, commanding things unlawful, careless exposing or leaving them to wrong temptation and danger or any way dishonoring themselves or lessening their authority by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous or remiss behavior. Here's an example. If you're a politician living in this system and you fail to outlaw pornography, you're essentially by your remission, allowing your inferiors, who you would assume actually do have less self-control than you, by the way.

But you're allowing an environment to be created in which people who need you to protect them are not being protected. Right.

So that's kind of like it's just fatherhood in at a social level. It's just motherhood at a social level. And so you can begin to see how far we've fallen because these days, like we don't even think in those categories anymore.

[16:44] We don't even like think about I need to make sure that how I act and what I do. This is this is another place where sins of omission become a massive different category.

Once you admit that you have a lot of responsibilities towards your fellow man, a lot of what you don't do reeks because there are people that need you to step up in countless ways.

So this idea is that this is the world that Lewis grew up in. It obviously had its problems. But, you know, you can't throw.

Yeah, but slavery card down every time you hear something that offends you. You know, it just it just doesn't work because like I have a yeah, but abortion card and we can compare numbers if you like.

But the point is, like, like evaluate the system. You know, for what it is, for what it does and so forth. And, you know, I definitely wouldn't be taking the bad away.

[17:45] But at the same time, I think it's important we at least understand the heights from which we've fallen. Now, that idea of naturally inhabited inferiors and superiors, it doesn't mean that someone is superior in every sphere.

One of the analogies used in church history a lot is, is that the commander of the battalion still kneels at the altar. So the commander of a battalion is still submissive to the priest.

It's in particular roles. There are particular duties. You're an inferior or superior in those particular places. All right. Lewis is living at the tail end of that whole world.

Equality, the word, is beginning to be used consistently. And we're in this fresh awareness of the authoritarian problem because most of Lewis's writing, most of his ministry is happening in World War II and, you know, leading up to and leading after World War II.

And this is where you start getting, you know, the first Hitler insertions into everything. And look at this totalitarian society. Look, look how, look how power wasn't evenly distributed and so forth.

[19:03] And so Lewis is having these conversations. Tolkien is having these conversations. Dorothy Sayers, all the people that have a classically tuned mind are recognizing, yes, we need to distribute power in a way that's thoughtful.

But we should never eliminate the sense that some people are in a superior position than inferior because there's consequences to that, too. So Lewis gets into this.

He has several lectures on this. This is where he begins to say that he's a Democrat, which doesn't mean what we think it means. He just means he believes in democracy. But he argues that democracy is just a medicine for the sickness of the human soul.

It doesn't cure anything. It's just the best way to treat the fact that we're all fallen and that no man really winds up being able to handle power as well as you had hoped.

So he is for a more distributed form of government, you know, a classical democracy. Obviously, he would be more in favor of a UK version of that. Some of you guys aren't like like and that's OK, too.

[20:13] You don't have to agree with his position there. But that's where he's at. He's he's not arguing for a straight up aristocracy or even a pure monarchy.

He kind of likes the government he has. He is a conservative in that sense. But he doesn't like it because all men actually are equal. He likes it for the same reason the founding fathers like it.

And that is let's dilute power. Let's let's let's dilute people's access to power because of the fallenness of man.

Now, you know, there's we won't get into that argument, but that's kind of where he's at. I think one of the ways that personally I have seen all of this play out is I use the analogy that's not very PC, but of the village idiot.

And I grew up in a small town. My first pastorate was in a really small town. And there are people in small towns that, you know, they just got God was dealing IQ cards.

[21:17] And, you know, they are there. They're down there, you know. And what you see in a small town where there's a hierarchy is the farmer or the shopkeeper looks at that man and says he is my inferior.

Therefore. Well, he is my inferior. He is also of equal worth to God. And therefore, I owe him something.

And one of the devastations of. Of the city, the big city is that inequality in general is, is if that man's my equal, I don't owe him anything.

But he's not my equal. And if we could just acknowledge that. Then we all do what I grew up doing, which is the guy who had that hand, the guy who was low IQ, ran a small engine repair business out off the highway.

And when your lawnmower broke down, even if you could fix it, you drove your lawnmower to this man. That was your obligation in that society as his superior.

[22:30] So, grasping at this ontological equality of like we're all equal. It has devastating effects on actually how care is distributed.

And it asks people to take parts of their, it asks people to take on challenges they aren't built to take. And I would argue that feminism is that.

It's, it's built up a system asking a group of people to do specific things they were not built to do.

And so, the big thing is, is this collapsing of hierarchy is happening in Lewis's life.

He's seeing that it's inevitable. And he begins to speak about it and think about it more consistently.

So, let me pause here and say that I think sometimes, and I'm not trying to make this appearance, but I think sometimes it sounds like I read more books than I do.

So, let me, I want to make sure I'm not gatekeeping something that I want all of you to know about.

And that is, when I was growing up, it was really, there's a thing called a commonplace book.

[23:42] And it's kind of like a quote book, but also more like a philosophical encyclopedia. You can Google this and read more about it on your own time. But what I started doing when I was in seventh grade was I would grab these books at the library.

They're really thick. And one of the most famous ones is a series by a man named Mortimer Adler, who, I don't know when he died, but he's popular in the 50s.

And he wrote this thing called the Syntopicon, which is just, here's six pages of quotes and thoughts about beauty. Or here's six pages on.

So, what I would do is I would go read those, and then I would see, well, this Aristotle guy, which I guarantee I didn't know how to pronounce it, this Aristotle dude, he, you know, he has a lot of interesting things.

So, then I would go read Aristotle. All that to say, I'm going to take you through some of my commonplace book entries on equality, because I want you to hear the tension that exists.

[24:44] And we're going to walk this tension into the book. Okay. So, all that to say, maybe I haven't read as many books as you think I have. Maybe I've just read a lot more of these commonplace books than you think.

And I would commend that to you. I think it's a good way of getting an on-ramp into people that are good thinkers. So, listen to this. Charles James Fox, an early English champion of democracy, he said, I am for equality.

I think men are entitled to equal rights, but to unequal ends. That's kind of like what we would, I think, all agree. It's like, we want people to have equality to some degree, but we cannot guarantee equal outcomes.

Samuel Johnson. So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other.

So, he's saying this idea that people are equal is false. Let two people spend a half hour together. Somebody's going to emerge as the superior. Okay.

[25:54] Another Frenchman writes, or no, that was, yeah, that was Johnson. The Frenchman writes, it is untrue that equality is a law of nature.

Nature has no equality. Its sovereign law is subordination and dependence. So, there's another voice, probably, so the empiricists, you know, along with Hobbes, or no, this would be Locke, John Locke, those types.

Like, no, obviously people aren't equal. Look at nature. Nothing's equal in nature. Like, not even the animals are disputing this fact. There's a head, there's a tail, like, you know, there's a runt of the litter and so forth.

Like, Bishop Berkeley, he kind of got to the same idea. George Crabb, he says it this way. He wants there to be hierarchy. He wants it to be true because it is the part of the exalted to treat the subordinate with indulgence.

[27:00] In other words, one of the great joys in life of being in a superior position is to treat your inferiors well and to be kind to them. And, again, that would get back to my village idiot idea.

Okay. So, the novel is entering with all of that vocabulary to begin with. Lewis believes in hierarchy. He's not entirely sure how that should play out politically.

But in terms of regular society, family, school, etc., he is full-blown into this idea that the head should be the head and that there's honor due to the head.

And there's also duties required of the head to care for his subordinates and so on and so forth.

Okay. Now to the book. This takes place on a college, which, as you know now, this is a huge part of social status climbing in Britain.

What college you go to and where you are, where you're teaching and so forth. And so, this is at Brackton College, a small, old, self-governing fellowship. I'm going to read a little bit so we can move faster.

[28:10] Its offices are legitimate and well-ordered, yet the college is now defunct. It's not defunct officially. It's defunct in the same way that the head of that school that Lewis went to at nine is defunct.

All the people still have their names on the doors. It's still, they're still having meetings. They still have a handbook. But the verve to lead well is gone.

It's a deep state kind of vibe at this point where the bureaucrats underneath the deans, underneath the heads, they're the ones sort of leading things. And there is a decision in play.

They own this wood, this forest in the middle of their college. And it's very large and very old. And they are persuaded into selling this valuable asset, which is the most valuable thing on the campus. Not because they're trying to all buy Rolexes or, you know, not because they have nefarious means. They're just wearied heads who are being wined and dined by this institute.

[29:26] Very nice, very, very, very polite. And essentially talk the college into selling this precious historical forest in the middle of the school.

So that's hierarchy number one. We're going to track all the hierarchies in the book real quick. The second one is nice. Which is the National Institute for Coordinated Experiments.

And you can see that Lewis is already understanding equality is nice. Kindness isn't always equal. Like he's already seeing what we live in. He's already seeing the gospel of niceness becoming a thing.

And you can read this in Mere Christianity. He talks exactly about this issue. Okay. So the second entity, the second hierarchy is called nice.

And it's outwardly quite nice. The institute presents itself as the personification of progress, bringing about national renewal, coordinating scientific efforts, and promoting humanitarian improvement.

[30:28] In reality, however, it's merely a desire for power disguised with a lab coat. The reason this book has regained prominence is mostly thanks to Fauci, Wuhan.

Like that's when this book really popped back into the national conversation. So you can see some layovers there. Now, secretly, in the middle of nice is the title of our essay or the title of this lecture, A Severed Head.

A head of a man that was executed by a guillotine, kept artificially alive using tubes and traps. Even the guillotine means something to a European. It's essentially cool, relentless, efficient, heartless scientism.

The guillotine was just the best way, the fastest way. You know, it's machinery execution, you know. So they would make a distinction between that and other forms. So the head's in the basement or in the center of nice, and it's being kept alive with hashtag science.

And what you've got here is you've got the essential image of the entire book, Lewis's whole burden for writing. And that is, here is a head that has been severed from its body, and he's thinking biblically of what head means in the Bible.

[31:48] He's thinking of hierarchy. He's thinking of a head that has failed the body. A head that says to the body, I have no need of you. Now, one of the things to notice, just as an aside, is that the whole strategy of nice, they're nefarious, they're dark, they're wicked.

The whole strategy is that they have learned that false humility is actually really easy to emulate, and that most people are too lazy to think through it, and they'll just pick up the signs of false humility and think, well, these people are humble, they're nice, and so forth.

And so what you've got, the main play of this villainous agency is to be the kind of aw shucks nice outwardly while actually being full of pride, you know, just full of all sorts of terrible wickedness. This reminded me, I won't read the story tonight, but this reminded me of Absalom, has every intention of usurping his father's authority, and he does it the most clever way possible. He goes to the city gate, and he meets with each person coming in, and glad hands them and says, what's your case today, you know, and then he essentially makes comments about the systemic failure of his father's kingdom.

[33:08] He said, oh, if only someone in Israel was here to hear your case, you know. He makes these kind of little side comments. But his best play is he was there in royal robes, he had chariots, you know, the whole thing.

And when these men from the country would come in to get their cases heard, they would incline to genuflect toward Absalom, to bow or something. And he would say, no, no, no, brother, we're the same.

He's like, we're just brothers. And he was playing the equality card as a seduction mechanism to win over the people of Israel.

And it worked. The text actually says, and by this he won the hearts of the men of Israel. So this is a very old card. And it's the false humility is actually really easy to manufacture.

Kirkpatrick types won't play the game. So for as many people as thought of him as the great Kirkpatrick, you know, he would have abuse blogs written about him today. Like, like we just have our orientation so broken about what kind is versus nice and so forth.

[34:16] So nice, the agency is playing this game really well. Now, two quick words about flatterers. Again, from my commonplace books, flatterers are the most kind of traitors, for they will strengthen thy imperfections.

Flatterers are the worst kind of traitors, for they will strengthen thy imperfections and encourage thee in all evils and correct thee in nothing. From William Penn, avoid flatterers, for they are thieves in disguise.

They lie to flatter and they flatter to cheat. And which is worse? If you believe them, you cheat yourselves most dangerously. So that's what's happening to Bracton.

Nice. That hierarchy is infiltrating Bracton hierarchy. And there's a play being run. And it all sounds very sweet.

It all appears very sweet. Proverbs 26, 27, 6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. And I just wrote here, Kirkpatrick wounded like a friend.

[35:19] Absalom kissed like an enemy. Nice and kind are not the same. Okay, so that's the first two hierarchies. Bracton, nice. Third is Mark and Jane.

The smallest of the hierarchies in the book. It's also the first one that the reader encounters. And Mark and Jane are full of the world's definitions of what a cosmopolitan marriage is and what a progressive marriage is and so forth.

And so Mark has given up his position of leadership simply by being absent and pursuing what he's pursuing. We'll talk more about that. He's not being cruel to her. He's just busy.

He's just preoccupied. And Jane, on the other hand, she has withheld her willingness to need him. She's essentially marked out this territory of a strong, independent woman.

And so this is a very young marriage. I forget how many months when Lewis drops in. But it is a marriage that is just not working.

[36:25] One of the things I read, I was stunned to see him. The first time I read this book, I was like, he wasn't married at this time. But he really understood the way that couples drift apart.

It was actually pretty interesting. Okay. Neither of these two are oppressing each other, but they're both neglecting their Westminsterian duties. So this is a hierarchy that's falling apart because of neglect.

And then finally, the fourth hierarchy, the only one that works in the book, is St. Anne's. In the story, this is where all the good guys hang out. It's the only society that is healthy.

It's also the society with the most turbulence. It's the society with the most turbulence. It's the only one that's healthy. It's also the one that feels the rockiest.

It feels the weirdest. Yeah. Let me describe it a little bit here. There's this manor outside of town called St. Anne's.

[37 : 28] And a man lives there named Ransom. If you've read the two first books, you know he is the Christ figure of, he is, at least by this point, he has a Christ shape about him.

The name is not subtle. It's just pointing directly to Christ. And he has real authority in the house. People actually obey him.

It's not servant leadership as we've come to know it. He has real authority. And all the signs of his authority are opposite those of the Institute. He subjects.

Like, he says, you will, I need you to do this, or I need you to do that. Like, it's just as simple. He commands, not because he is above others, but because he too is subject to the power which he serves.

You know, he is the Christ figure. He has a wound that will not heal. A wound sustained in an earlier battle from, you know, the earlier book. And he bears it the same way that, you know, Christ would bear that wound as proof that he has gone through the Philippians 2 cycle.

[38 : 40] And is worthy to be followed. Now, his household is full of weird people. He's got a maid and a philosopher and a skeptic and a bear.

Now, what do you think Lewis is doing there? Like, Lewis is going out of his way to say, if there is one true head, then the many members can actually coexist.

And one of the most interesting things about St. Anne's is Ransom's in charge. There's no question about that. And the charwoman, the maid, she can just be a maid.

And the philosopher can be a philosopher. The philosopher doesn't have to pretend that he's on the maid's level. And the maid doesn't have to pretend that she's a philosopher. It's an ordered hierarchy of equal worth, but not equal function.

And it's all underneath an actual head. And so you've got, essentially, Lewis just painting. And, you know, this is why Tolkien didn't like the book, I think.

[39 : 45] He's just painting in these really obvious, heavy-handed colors. He's like, the bad guys, they have a severed head. You know, he's basically doing, like, Bunyan-level, you know, allegories.

Not very cleverly disguised. The good guys, they have a guy named Ransom. And so it's not a very sophisticated play, really. But he's just showing, he wants it out in bold colors.

And so what you've got with the severed head and all that kind of stuff is you've just got 1 Corinthians 12 language all over this concept.

1 Corinthians 12, You're a large man to come up this far. You're good. 1 Corinthians 12, And of course, the answer is no.

This is so interesting because if you look at the way that the world would have us order our churches, our homes, our government, it just wants everybody, we just want a nation full of heads, don't we?

[41 : 17] Like, it's a nation full of severed heads. And Lewis is seeing all of this, not because he's actually a prophet, I think, but because he's thinking at first principles, and he can, with first principles thinking, kind of sort out the trajectory.

Anyway, all this is thoroughly Christian language. Ephesians talks about growing up into the head, and Colossians talks about the head holding everything together, the body, the bands, and all that stuff.

So, this idea of headship is, you know, everywhere in Scripture. Lewis is just pasting it in different places.

But then, of course, relevant to us, you've got Ephesians 5, Matthew Henry, commenting on one of these body passages, puts it this way.

Now, what you've got in the case of Brackton and Mark are two heads that aren't actually watching their bodies.

[42:48] Brackton's body is the wood, and the thing in the wood. Mark's body is Jane. And I want you to notice how they're both seduced away for caring for their heads, or for their bodies, and why.

So, you've got Brackton, superior, it's the superiors, the head over the wood. Mark, superior head over Jane. Now, Brackton gets charmed and exhausted into just giving up the wood.

Now, Mark gets the exact same thing, just in reverse. He's exhausted because he doesn't know how to make his wife happy, because he's a guy, and he's just married, and he's full of all these modern ideas that aren't helping him at all.

So, he starts exhausted, and that exhaustion, coupled with the seduction of the inner ring, pulls his eyes off of Jane.

Now, what's going on here is so essential, because essentially, what he's saying, what Lewis is saying is that, and he talks about this, and he writes an essay on the inner ring, which I think is one of the most important spiritually formational kind of things you should ever read.

[44:01] It'll tell you exactly, like, one of the main temptations of your life, of every man's life, is to find access to the next level of acceptance, power, etc.

Not out of a craving for power, but out of a craving for recognition, out of a craving for respect and esteem. So, Mark isn't getting that at home. Jane doesn't know how to do that.

Mark's like, you know, he's pursuing that. He's found this inner ring that he's very attached to, and it all happens to be located within Nice. And so, what Nice is doing, in both cases, is they're seducing the heads away from their stewardship.

And they're doing that through being nice and courteous and flattering and so forth. And they're seducing these two.

Now, the characters, Brackton as a whole and Mark, they think that they are being esteemed. They think that they are finally being accepted and recognized and respected.

[45:07] But what is Nice actually after in both cases? They're not after Brackton. They don't care about Brackton. They don't care about the leaders. They want the wood. They want something in the wood.

Do they want Mark? No. They want his wife. And so, one of the things to just be super aware of as a leader is, these moments will happen to you where there are inferiors that you're supposed to care and protect and take care of.

And a play will get run on you by a new woman at work when your marriage is at the worst moment it's been in 10 years. Whatever. By an opportunity to do X, Y, or Z somewhere else.

By an opposition at church. You will find something that will try to get you. It will be in the hands of the enemy of your souls. To pull you off of stewarding your particular hierarchy.

And that's a play being run on you. And it will feel like you just made it. Like you just, like someone loves you. Someone respects you.

[46:16] Someone finally finds you interesting. And so forth. And so, this is a play that gets run on both men and women. Especially in marriages that get thin, dehydrated, anemic, however you want to put this.

But you have to understand that poor Mark, he is just, the guy doesn't understand. Now, for those of you that haven't read the book, Mark's wife is having dreams.

And she has the capacity to sort of see the future to some degree. And so, I think that's Lewis is just saying, like, that's the feminine, you know, mystique kind of idea that Lewis would talk about. And then in the wood is Merlin.

Like Merlin Merlin. Like the original Merlin. And so, like Merlin of Merlin fame, you know. And so, what's happening there is that Nice wants the deep magic.

And listen to how, like, broken, or not broken, but deceptive the whole Nice stuff is. Like, they're all about science, but not really. They're really after magic.

[47:15] They're really after, like, they're after the spiritual. Now, this is another play I want to make a case for. I want to make the case that, essentially, this is the most, you know, this is the most Alex Jones I'll sound tonight.

I want to make a case that you have been taught by elitists for your whole life that we live in a material world.

Not because they actually believe that, but because they want the magic for themselves. And they want the magic unopposed. That's my, like, deep conviction.

That all of this atheistic, materialistic worldview stuff isn't actually their sincere belief in a meaningful way. It's actually demonic, pulling all of the people who would pray to Jesus and be on Team God away from those inclinations so that they can live in their little dark, spiritually dark world, you know, uncountered.

And I think that Lewis is seeing something like that in the way that he positions Nice as being scientist, and it's totally false. It's not true.

[48:32] They're not. They actually want Merlin. They literally want a wizard. Now, one of the things that I have to say, I want to warn you about that, so take that.

But now I just want to praise God for a minute, because one of the other things Lewis does here is he, I have to understand something. Lewis made this commitment, it's a crazy commitment, that whoever would write him a letter, he would write them back.

Okay? And so thousands and thousands of letters. It was a major part of every day. Handwriting letters back. A lot of those letters I've read, they were published about 10 years ago.

I bought the whole thing. And a lot of those letters are written from women, not in any inappropriate way, but who are lonely and no one's looking after them.

And they are trying to talk to someone who will, that they consider to be smart and loves God. And so a lot of these letters are very interesting because it's a lot of people who haven't been properly led by their head reaching out to Lewis.

[49:37] And I think most of you know that's how Lewis got married eventually. And so a woman in that exact situation, losing her husband, marriage falling apart, and she starts turning to God.

And they connect, and eventually he marries Joy Davidman. And the point I want to make is that's in the book. This is before Lewis had any of that experience. But in both cases, evil is being so conniving and clever, they're like, they're talking up a good game to Mark going after Jane.

They're talking up a good game to Bracken going after the wood. And in both cases, God's just like, no. He just intervenes providentially. So what does Merlin do when he does wake up?

Where does he go? He reports to Ransom. Where does she wind up? She reports to Ransom. Doesn't want to. Has all the feminist ick about it.

But she winds up on Team Ransom, too. And I just think that's a beautiful reminder of like, yes, let's not be weak heads. Let's not let go of the things we're supposed to tend to. But I also praise God that he is providentially guiding weak people to himself, even when their heads have failed them.

[50:57] And I thought also just about how, as men with fathers maybe that were more of the abdicators, they weren't, they didn't have their eye on the ball.

How you might be in the position even now to say, you know, wow, God, you know, it was a little bit of a long hike. But God delivered me to Ransom's house when really the enemy was trying to get me that whole time.

Okay. So I just think that's a very beautiful insight. Now, that comes up again in Narnia because we have a little girl left alone in the woods, totally vulnerable.

And who finds her? Right. Which is so beautiful. And it's also like we should never count on that.

We should always assume you just don't leave weak people in the woods, you know.

But it's so beautiful that he could keep writing these redemption stories from that particular perspective. And I think if you thought about it, you'd probably see someplace where someone did drop the ball with you.

[52:03] And then we could just say the classic Christian line, but God. You know, and that's just a beautiful thing. All right. So let's talk. We're wrapping up.

Let's talk about hard versus soft elitism real quick. It's another major theme in the book. Lewis has two versions of elitism interplaying. There's the elitist of the nice people.

They're evil. They know they know better. They know they know better. And the reality is, it's like those guys are in our world right now and they have a lot of power.

Elitism is a real problem. Now, the tech sector in particular, in particular, our new AI demigods, like there's a lot of individuals who genuinely are severed heads.

They genuinely think, I know better. I'm in charge. I will do what I need to do. So that's a real thing.

We have to watch out for that. But for the most part, that play only works if we crave the inner ring and we are suffering from soft elitism, where we are actually interested in being accepted into the good corners of society and be admitted into the reasonable people club and so on and so forth.

[53:28] That's the second kind of elitism that Lewis is talking about. And that's where Mark almost just utterly destroys himself and his family. Everything almost is overcome simply because Mark doesn't understand that he has a real lust for acceptance.

And the reality is, is like, that's something that every man has to understand about themselves. It's the core of a lot of the bad things we do.

It's also the core of a lot of things we don't do. I was thinking about after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It said, many believed in him. This is John 12.

Many believed in him, but did not step up because they love the glory of man more than they love the glory of God. A lot of the things we don't do come from we're being played.

The silent communication in this moment is, if you were to do that, I won't think you're nice anymore. It's like, well, yeah, but maybe it's kind to do what I need to do.

[54:35] So this play, I think, is the bigger play. As Jordan Peterson says, people always worry about the strong man, but look at what a weak man is capable of if you really want to be frightened.

And the weak man is someone fundamentally has a lust for the inner ring. If you can't master that lust, you can't really be trusted. And fundamentally, that's the ransom scar.

The ransom scar is, they offered me the kingdom when I had fasted for 40 days. You know, they offered me a way out, and I didn't take it.

They offered me the easy way, and I didn't take it. And those are the people we follow. And those are the people that we need to become. So, back to, and we're wrapping up here, to St. Anne's.

There is no inner ring at St. Anne's. Everybody is in a relationship with ransom. That's the ring.

One-on-one, ransom, charwoman.

[55:35] One-on-one, ransom, bear. You know, they don't all even necessarily get along together. The skeptic isn't asked to stop being a skeptic, even. They're all in their individual orbits, but they're all, the whole house works because it's oriented toward ransom.

So, functionally, they are not equal. The maid and the philosopher are not equal. They're ontologically in value. They are because ransom loves them all equally.

And that's the place we have to get to as we build societies in Christendom. We have to build societies where both of those things are accepted, and we're never tempted to divorce one from the other so that those two things can exist.

And that's really where we see human flourishing come from. It's like, well, how does that happen? And the answer is one of my favorite theological concepts, and that is from Jonathan Edwards and the diverse excellencies of Jesus Christ.

Here's the reality. Jesus Christ, this is the main point of that hideous strength. Jesus Christ heals broken hierarchies. That's it.

[56:48] He heals broken heads. He heals broken followers. Jesus Christ heals hierarchies. And when he is present, high and lifted up, when he is exalted, when he is the point, things work in a way that they don't when something else is the head.

Edwards talked a lot about the diverse excellencies of Jesus because, in his estimation, he's a very smart man, I agree with this, in his estimation, it is Jesus' diverse excellencies, I'll explain what that is in a minute, that compels worship and keeps the conditions right for people to be together.

And let me just read what he says and maybe you'll be able to infer it. This is actually from Revelation 5, which I'll be teaching in a week in another country.

Let me just introduce that text to you real quick. The question is, who can open the scroll? And it's the lion of the tribe of Judah. You know, like, who can open it?

It's Jesus. But then we see that he's not just a lion, he's a lamb slain. And this is when we start getting this idea that there's something layered about Jesus where he is as strong as you can think and as meek as you can think.

[58:14] And all of these things that shouldn't fit together are him. He is a man of great justice. He's also a man of great mercy, you know. And Revelation 5 is this really surprising moment because you find out that the reason that God's purposes can unfold is because the lion became the lamb.

And the whole book of Revelation is just telling people over and over again. It's just like 1 Peter when we looked at 1 Peter. Yes, life is hard. Suffer well and you will win.

That's, you know, it's repeated in chapter 12. The great accuser is thrown down because they loved out their lives but became obedient even unto death. So Edwards says, John was informed about a

lion which had managed to open the book and likely anticipated seeing a lion in his vision. But as he was expected to see one, there appeared a lamb to open the book. A creature entirely unlike a lion. A lion is a predator, one accustomed to causing dreadful slaughter among other animals.

And no creature is more easily caught as prey by it than a lamb. Jesus Christ possesses a most admirable union of various excellencies. Although the lion and the lamb are very different kinds of animals, each of them has its own particular merits.

[59 : 33] The lion is superior in strength and indignity of his look and voice, while the lamb is outstanding in meekness and patience. Yet we find in the text that Christ is compared with both of them where the distinct excellencies of each are wonderfully brought together in him.

And that's how hierarchies hold. You have the strength and the weakness. You have the inferior and the superior in one person. You have a model for headship in Ephesians 5, but you have a model for total submission in Philippians 2.

Right? And so the reason that hierarchies are healed in the presence of Jesus is that Jesus is the hierarchy in many respects.

Edwards continues, Such a conjunction of infinite highness and low condescension in the same person is admirable. We see by manifold instances what a tendency a high station has in men to make them of a quite contrary disposition.

Here he's talking about how does the superior not get puffed up. Listen to this. If one worm be a little exalted above another by having more dust. And that's, friends, that's Elon's IQ and my lawnmower guy.

[60 : 50] There's just two worms, one has a little more dust. Acknowledging that makes our society work. Acknowledging the dust difference makes our society work.

Boasting in that breaks our society. Right? Like, these are just the basic ideas. He's like, okay, if a worm has a little more exalted above another by having more dust or a bigger dunghill, how much does he make of himself?

Yet Christ condescends to wash our feet. But how would great men, or rather the bigger worms, account themselves debased by acts of far less condescension?

More dust or a bigger dunghill? That's the way that broken hierarchies think. But healed hierarchies in the presence of Christ says, if I have this much more dust, I will find it, and I will use it to serve those that have less.

And the key is that the person with less has to engage in a transaction in which that difference is acknowledged, accepted, and so forth.

[61 : 56] But if we all have to pretend that we have the exact equal same contribution to make, we can't get there. So Jesus gives us everything we actually need to live out the St. Anne's life in community and the St. Anne's life in our home.

Philippians 2, 5-8, Let this mind be in you. Let this mind be in you. Which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

So that's the severed head. Thoughts? Questions? I think I heard you say you've identified as a nation in severed heads.

How would you pick that over? I think you're right. I'm saying that our fantasy, our delusional perspective, is that we all have to be the heads.

Thanks.