

The Wild Beasts Of Ephesus

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[0 : 00] Now this evening, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15, verse 32. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 32.

What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? I fought with beasts at Ephesus.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Of all the great Christian missionaries of the 20th century, Jim Elliot stands in the front rank. As a young man, Jim Elliot could have pursued any number of careers.

But he chose to become a missionary to the Huarani Indians of Ecuador. Newly married, Elliot threw himself into making contact with the Huarani.

[1 : 14] But on January the 8th, 1956, Elliot and his four missionary companions were attacked and killed by a group of Huarani warriors.

Elliot's body was found sometime later downstream, stabbed and mutilated. A 28-year-old man with the whole world before him, dead in an Ecuadorian rainforest.

What a waste. Before he left for Ecuador, knowing that he may well face death for his faith in Christ, some of his friends questioned his sanity.

They tried to persuade him to stay in the safety of the United States. Elliot famously responded to them. He said, Now we might admire men like Jim Elliot.

Men and women who risk everything for the gospel are easy to admire. But let me ask you something, every one of us, myself included. To what extent are you risking not so much everything for the gospel, but anything for the gospel?

[3 : 15] Anything at all? Compared to Elliot's generation, adventure that we lack both. People who are willing to risk everything for Jesus, and more pointedly, people who are willing to risk anything for Jesus.

We must ask ourselves whether we too believe what Jim Elliot said, that he's no fool who gives what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose. Now the apostle Paul, upon whom Jim Elliot modeled his ministry, writes in this verse that he fought with wild beasts in Ephesus.

We don't exactly know to what Paul was referring. As a Roman citizen, he was exempt from punishment in the Roman arena. There were no lions for him, as there would be for tens of thousands of other Christians.

Perhaps he's referring to the ferocity of the opposition he received as a Christian preacher. These were ordinary people.

But they were enraged by the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and they assumed beast-like properties. For all the world, they acted like wild animals. Paul was persecuted, mocked, and beaten, because he was given what he could not keep to gain what he could not lose.

[4 : 45] The question, surely, for all of us is this. I really hope tonight, especially the young folk are listening, because I first heard the Jim Elliot quote when I was 15, and it profoundly affected the course of my life.

Was the death of Jim Elliot and his four missionary companions a waste? Were the beatings Paul received at the hands of the wild beasts of Ephesus?

All for nothing. And why is it that in our Western culture, it's hard enough to persuade a Christian to risk anything for Jesus, let alone everything. It's hard enough to persuade Christians to commit to attending church, let alone risking their lives for Jesus.

Why can't we find men who are willing to go into the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland? In 1 Corinthians 15 and 32, Paul sheds light on the answers to these questions.

It's because so few of us believe what Jim Elliot said, and for what he gave his life, that you're no fool who gives what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose.

[6 : 03] In our Western culture, we lack the perspective of eternal life, that what we've got now is at the tiniest tip of the iceberg, of the quantity and quality of all we shall enjoy afterwards, when after we die, we are raised to new life with Christ, a life of glorious beauty, in his closer presence in heaven.

We lack an eternal mindset. That's why we're so unwilling to give what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose.

That's why, compared with Jim Elliot, the Apostle Paul, and so many others, so many other Christians today, in the developing world, were such spiritual pygmies.

Well, tonight I want us to regain an eternal perspective as Christians, an eternal perspective which makes us wise not just to give anything for Christ, but to be willing to give everything for Christ.

Let's consider three things. First, the world's attitude to the Christian life. Second, the wild beasts of the Christian life, and third, the wider view of the Christian life.

[7 : 29] You know, I sometimes wonder, from speaking to my colleagues, why in the face of great challenges, anyone, would want to be a gospel minister in Scotland these days.

I need to remind myself, and my colleagues, Stephen, that I have an opportunity, that this is the ultimate reason. The man is no fool who gives what he can't keep, to gain what he can't lose.

First of all then, the world's attitude to the Christian life. The world's attitude to the Christian life.

Now, this section of 1 Corinthians 15, in which our verse is located, is chiefly concerned with the implications of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

That physical resurrection, which itself secures the physical resurrection, also of all those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus. Remember, we used this at Hallie's funeral.

Founded upon the factual historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the apostle Paul is building a case for Christians to give what they can't keep, to gain what they can't lose, to be willing to risk anything and everything for the gospel.

[8 : 50] It's in this context, Paul speaks of how he fought with wild beasts in Ephesus. Now, it would have been very interesting to conduct a forensic autopsy of the body of the apostle Paul.

Silent witness type forensic autopsy. The examining pathologist would have discovered skin damaged by countless superficial injuries, evidence of broken bones and torn ligaments.

He would have concluded that the victim he was examining, the body he was examining, had been the victim of sustained and violent torture.

And one can imagine that pathologist standing over Paul's body and saying, what on earth did this fellow do to attract such sustained and violent torture?

And the answer that Paul's friends would have given him would have been this. That man told men and women that God loved them, that Jesus died for them, and the third day he rose again.

[10 : 06] Well, later on, just imagine the situation, relaxing with a wee shot of whiskey and a cigar. That forensic pathologist would have discussed Paul's case with his colleagues, as I know medics do.

You can imagine the discussion between them. He would have said, I've never seen such a catalogue of injuries. This is a man who really suffered in life, and I for one would like to know whether it's worth it.

Another colleague said to him, all this stuff Paul talked about, everlasting life and eternal life, it's all nonsense. We have one life, and when it's over, it's over.

Rather than suffer for a fiction like that poor fellow Paul, isn't it better that we enjoy our lives here and now? And together, as the evening goes on, the group of pathologists agree that unless there is life after death, the kind of suffering Paul endured really wasn't worth it.

Better to give in to the wild beasts, better to go over the flow and enjoy today's life. After all, they didn't know that 2,000 years later, young people would be saying, YOLO, you only live once.

[11 : 26] And after that, the pathologists finish their whiskey and cigars and go home. Isn't this the attitude the world takes toward the Christian, and especially the one who is suffering for her faith?

You only live once, so make the most of life and forget about what may or may not happen after you die. Do what you need to do to hold on to as much of this life and this life's good things before the end comes.

These forensic pathologists examining Paul's body thought he was a fool to have suffered so much for a fictional fantasy of a life he'd after.

And many have thought the same thing about Gemalio. And missionary since, that missionary who was killed a couple of years ago on the Solomon Islands, for sure their deaths are tragedies.

Even the world takes pity on a man being torn apart by a wild beast. But their tragedies are ultimately pointless. The Roman crowds in the amphitheater, in the Colosseum, baying for blood, drank their wine while the Christians were being torn apart by the lions and they mocked the Christians and they said naive idiots.

[12 : 48] I can't approve it. But I get the impression post-pandemic that we're living in days when the love of many Christians for the Lord Jesus Christ is waning cold.

Many have lost a grip of the reality of the Christian life precisely for this reason. They've been sucked in by the lie. You only live once.

You only live once. Why bother fighting with the wild beast of Ephesus when the alternative is eating, drinking, making merry?

Personal comfort wins over sacrificial Christ-likeness. Personal pleasure wins over radical holiness. Personal security wins over the experience of grace.

This is the experience, this is the world's attitude to the Christian life spilling over into the church. Jim Elliot famously said, and if you don't know this quote by the time you leave tonight, you really should.

[13 : 59] He is no fool who gives what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose. The you only live once generation turns its nose up at Jim Elliot's wisdom. Let me ask you a question.

To which version of reality do you cling today? That of Jim Elliot who was willing to give up everything for Jesus knowing that he stood to gain far more or that of the world around us which says eat, drink, and be merry.

And then let me ask you something else, something even more challenging. Prove it. Prove you believe that.

Not just are you giving everything up for Jesus, are you giving anything up for Jesus? Are you at all fighting these wild beasts at Ephesus? the world's attitude to the Christian life.

Well secondly, let's look at the wild beasts of the Christian life. The wild beasts of the Christian life.

We'll never really know for sure what the wild beasts against which Paul fought here really were.

[15 : 17] Were the human beings driven insane by their hatred of the gospel? Were the real animals set on Paul a pack of dogs as a punishment for his preaching of the gospel? We just don't know.

What we do know is that over the years they broke his body and they broke his mind. They did. But they could not break his spirit.

His faith in the grace of Christ kept them strong. Now I can confidently predict that none of us will have wild animals set upon us as a punishment for our preaching of the gospel.

We may have other people driven mad by their hatred of the gospel. Christians in many parts of the world today have this as their daily experience. In fact I learned on Friday listening to UCB one out of every seven Christians in our world today is experiencing active persecution.

And it correctly understood every one of us here this evening is fighting more fundamental beasts. Beasts which are only worth fighting if we stand to gain more than we will lose.

[16 : 26] resurrection life with Jesus. These beasts aren't worth fighting if this life is all that is. But if we stand to gain eternal life we'll fight them.

Remembering always the words of Paul in another place these light and momentary troubles are preparing us for an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all.

well among the many wild beasts to which we can refer I want to get away from pietism here. Let me direct your attention to three wild beasts.

The spiritual battle, the sacrificial lifestyle, and the sonship training. First wild beast, the spiritual battle.

When was it we forgot that as Christians we're in a constant spiritual battle? The militant language of us being Christian soldiers has perhaps been lost.

[17 : 31] But in Ephesians 6 Paul speaks of us engaging in spiritual warfare in which we need to don the whole armor of God. He writes we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

No doubt he's referring chiefly to our warfare against ongoing sin in our lives, the battle for purity, the war for sanctity. We're in a spiritual battle.

Our enemy the devil wishes only evil upon us. He will kill you if he can. Get that? He will kill you if he can. And if he can't he will freeze your heart against the vibrancy of a living faith in Jesus Christ. And more fool us because we have forgotten that we're in a spiritual battle. Many of us bear the scars of such a battle in our Christian lives and in our Christian ministries.

broken hearts, wounded minds. To what extent are you fighting this Christian war against your own sin and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places?

[18 : 59] What are the signs of your struggle for purity and sanctity? The putting to death of sin in our lives, the mortification of sin as they used to say.

Well perhaps you say to me tonight I face no such battle. To which I say that's because you've given up the fight. Satan will only oppose those who are standing strong in the faith, standing tall for Christ.

Be honest in prayer, be strong in the word, be much in fellowship, be serious about your Christ likeness. This is one of the wild beasts of Ephesus which if there is no resurrection it's not worth fighting.

The second wild beast is this, the sacrificial lifestyle. The sacrificial lifestyle. Jesus' consistent command to his disciples is to love God and to love others.

It is in the very nature of love to sacrifice oneself for others. That's what Jesus did for us. that's what we shall do for one another if we are to pursue Christ likeness.

[20 : 12] But self sacrifice you know it's so hard. It's not natural to put someone else's interests before our own. It's not natural to sacrifice a significant portion of your well earned income for the work of the church.

It's not natural to sacrifice your free time so you may serve others in this church. It's hard to sacrifice yourself for others especially when that sacrifice is at times thrown right back in your face.

Well here's the question. To what extent are we sacrificing everything? Well or even anything for Christ? Christ? What about that relationship in your life that you know is wrong?

Or that sinful habit you really enjoy but you know is damaging your spiritual life? In the light of the resurrection life of Jesus, are you willing to give up what you cannot keep to gain what you cannot lose?

That's the question is it not? To what extent is your life a sacrifice of praise to King Jesus? prove it by the scars you carry.

[21 : 38] Again, this is another beast of Ephesus which if there's no resurrection from the dead, it's not worth fighting. And then the third is this, sonship training.

Sonship training. Let me rewind a little bit. The devil cares nothing for you as a Christian. He acts only to destroy you and your faith in Jesus, but your heavenly father loves you infinitely and he only ever acts to build up your faith in Jesus.

And he treats us as any loving father treats his child. He trains us, he disciplines us, he chastises us, he defines us to remove the dross so as to leave only the gold.

This is sonship training when our father trains us for deeper reliance and faithfulness upon him. And there are times as a Christian you may resent such training.

The writer of the Hebrews with sobriety says such discipline is painful. The horror of mental illness may be a thorn in the flesh reminding us always that we need Christ's grace, but it's a painful thorn.

[22 : 58] And you might ask the question, why does God refine his people at so hot a temperature? Why does God refine his people at so hot a temperature?

Why does he train them so hard? It's because we got a father who loves us too much to allow us to ever set our hope upon the temporary pleasures of this world, but rather trains us for the infinite pleasures of the world to come.

That's why. These are three beasts, among many others, which we fight as Christians, and if there's no resurrection life afterwards, there's no point resisting.

What's the point of fighting a spiritual battle if you only live once? What's the point of a sacrificial lifestyle if you only live once? What's the point of painful sonship training if you only live once?

What's the point of dying at the end of an Ecuadorian tribal spear if you only live once? Never mind everything. What's the point of giving anything up for Jesus if you only live once?

[24 : 12] No point fighting the wild beasts in this case. Just get on eating and drinking. Just get on being made merry. the last thing we want to look at this evening is the wider view of the Christian life.

The wider view of the Christian life. Well in human terms I guess the apostle Paul gained nothing by the way he lived, suffering the way he did, dying the way he did, neither did the Lord Jesus.

They gained nothing by living the way they did, suffering the way they did, and dying the way they did if there is no life hereafter. If we live in a world without the resurrection life of Jesus, then Paul's question rings true.

What do I gain if humanly speaking I fought with wild beasts to Ephesus? Humanly speaking, Paul would have been far better off adopting the attitude of the world around him.

As you read there, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. But you see, that's the very point in question.

[25 : 34] Tomorrow we die. Tomorrow we give up what we cannot keep. We take our last breath, and all our temporary pleasures come to an end. our careers, our lifestyles, our relationships, our experiences, our money, they all end tomorrow.

But according to the historical record, as mentioned by Paul earlier in this chapter, Christ has risen from the dead. By his death on the cross, he has put death to death, and by his resurrection from the dead, he has earned eternal life for his people.

He has once for all shown that the tomorrow we die mentality fails to take into account what comes after tomorrow. The resurrection, the eternal life, in the light of which all our light and momentary troubles pale into insignificance.

After his death, the Roman city pathologist autopsied his body and found that it bore the marks of horrendous suffering.

But was it worth it? Paul gained what he couldn't keep, but he gained what he couldn't lose. He gained eternal life and joy at the right hand of the Father.

[27 : 01] Tell me, straight question, if you have a fear of flying, close your ears. is it worth waiting an uncomfortable parachute if you know that the plane on which you're flying is doomed to crash?

Is it worth waiting an uncomfortable parachute if you know that the plane on which you're going to fly is doomed to crash? Of course it is. Of course it's worth putting up with the discomfort of a parachute on your back.

Tell me, is it worth all the struggles, the sacrifices and the sufferings of the Christian life if you know that a better life awaits you as a result?

Of course it is. Immeasurably. Every scar we bear here as a consequence of being followers of Jesus Christ shall be a star of victory in the crown of heaven.

Let's ask Paul himself. Paul, in the light of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and therefore your own future resurrection, tell me Paul, was it worth fighting those wild beasts in Ephesus?

[28 : 21] And he says, of course it was, by comparison I lost nothing, but I gained everything. And then we speak to Jim Elliot, Jim, in the light of the resurrection of Jesus from losing your life preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ecuador, and Jim says to us, of course it was, I lost nothing, and I gained everything.

for those of us who are professing Christians today, let me challenge you, prove to me that you're not living for today, but for the resurrection life of Jesus.

Prove it, by your sonship training, by your sacrificial lifestyle, by your spiritual battle, show me your scars, prove it by the scars you've got from fighting the wild beasts of Ephesus.

And then for those of us who are not yet Christians, in the light of all the apostle has said about the life to come, do you really suppose, do you really suppose it's wisdom to forfeit what you can't lose on the altar of what you can't keep?

Is it wisdom to forfeit what you can't lose on the altar of what you can't keep? Or rather is it not better than here and now this very moment you're going to resolve in your mind and in your heart that you're going to believe in Jesus Christ and you're going to live for Jesus Christ whatever the cost of that decision might be.

[30 : 21] Let us pray. Father I confess that there's been a time that I make peace with these wild beasts in Ephesus as opposed to fighting them.

And I'm sure my confession can be shared by many others here too that would rather have a bit of pleasure in this world than experience these afflictions.

Lord give us that eternal perspective that the apostle Paul had and Jim Elliot had and so many others who have gone before us that really we can't keep anything that we earn during this life but we can't lose anything that we commit in faith to you.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Now why is it that we talk about the gospel so much? Why is it we esteem the gospel so highly? It's because the gospel is our life. Jesus pleads for us at the right hand of the Father on high. We have a just and perfect priest whose name is love.

[31 : 39] Let's stand as we sing before the throne of God above I have a great a perfect plea. great Amen.