

Are You Ready for the Lions?

Come back with me to the year 51AD. Look on, as another Christian is about to be thrown to the lions. This man has one last chance to publicly deny his faith in Jesus Christ, but he doesn't. The awaiting crowd roars with delight. Once again, the grizzly sight of blood and bone will be spread across the blood-soaked soil of the arena.

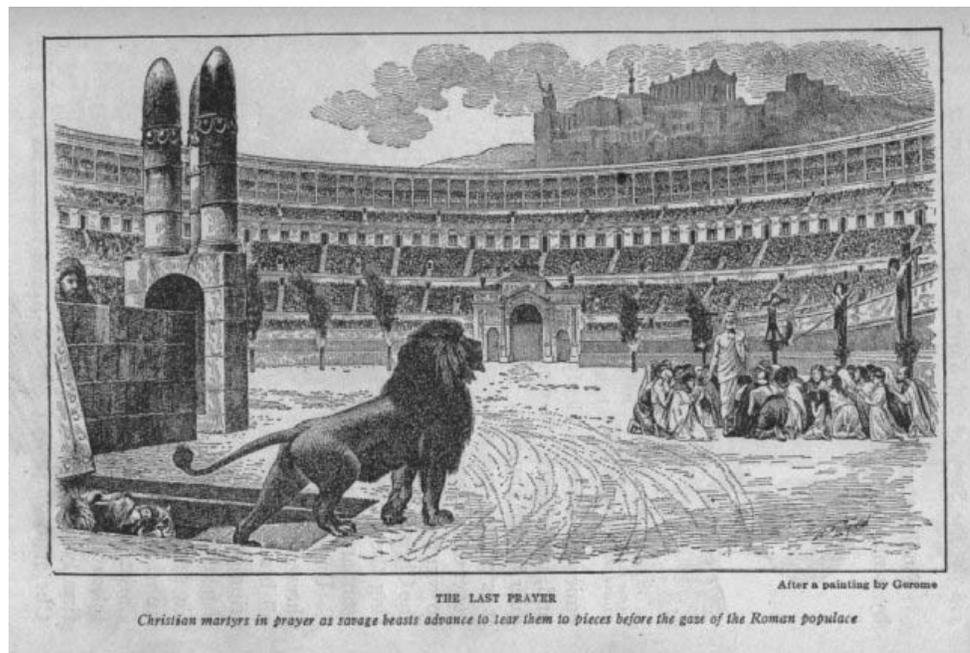
These Christians rarely disappointed the bloodthirsty mob. There weren't many backsliders. Despite the entertainment, it was a continual mystery to the crowd as to why anyone would willingly allow himself to be torn apart by ferocious lions when a simple nod of the head would free him to go back to his beloved family. So, why is this man ready to be torn limb from limb by ferocious teeth?

A few years earlier, this godless man had been in Athens on a business trip and had heard the gospel from the lips of an apostle preaching on Mars Hill. He heard the apostle say that his hearers had sinned against Heaven, and therefore needed a Savior because God "had appointed a Day in which He would judge the world in righteousness."¹ He listened as this faithful apostle spoke of that "righteousness of God apart from the law,"² and showed him that he was under God's dreadful wrath.

As he stood among the crowd, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth had said "Whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery already with her in his heart."³ He had violated that Commandment many times. He also heard that God would send all thieves and liars to Hell—"All liars will have their part in the lake of fire,"⁴ and that He considered hatred to be murder.⁵ His conscience began to stir within him and remind him of his guilt. This Judgment Day of which the apostle preached would be a fearful thing. He began to feel a very real dread that he truly was under God's wrath, and would end up in the lake of fire. As he hung his head in a strange mixed sense of sorrow and dread, he heard the preacher explain that this same Jesus of Nazareth—the Lamb of God—had suffered and died on a Roman cross in his place. God Himself had provided a Savior. The Messiah took the sin of the world upon Himself. He paid

for our sin in His life's blood by suffering and dying in our place. But death could not hold Him. He burst from the grave; and through faith in His Name eternal salvation was offered to all men.

This sinful man lifted his head in unbelief that God would love him that much. He listened closely to hear what he should then do. He was simply to "repent, and believe in the gospel"⁶ and call upon the Name of the Lord.⁷ That's what he did. He bowed his head once again and earnestly prayed,



"God forgive me for sinning against you. Jesus Christ—be my Lord and Savior . . ."

It was then that he found that Almighty God was almighty indeed. He made him a new creature. He was born again, with a new heart and new desires. God wrote His Law upon his heart and caused him to walk in His statutes. This man, who once lived for sin and drank it in like water, suddenly found that he thirsted for righteousness, and wanted, above all things, to please the God that gave him life. It was a miracle. One day he had no thoughts of God. Not for a second. The next day the love of God was shed abroad in his heart. The Holy Spirit made His abode in him. This gospel of salvation came to him with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance.

This man, whose only concern had been for himself, suddenly became possessed with an all-consuming passion to share the Gospel of salvation with a dying world. It was as though he was filled with rivers of living water. But there was more. When he prayed, he had an inner conviction that God heard his every whisper. It was as though he had been given

the gift of faith. He believed without effort. The Name of Jesus was sweet to his ear, and Jesus Christ became more important to him than his own life. The cross he had been told about shone before him with the intensity of the noonday sun. He gloried in it. He found himself weeping at the thought that God in Christ would suffer in his place. Guilt no longer plagued his sinful heart. It was removed as far as the east is from the West. Secret and sinful passions fell off his flesh like unwanted and rotting clothes. Old things passed away--behold, all things became new. He bubbled with an unspeakable joy and relished a peace that passed all understanding. God had given him the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. His faith was solely in God through Christ, and His sure promise of life.

So, why is this man ready to be torn limb from limb by ferocious teeth? It is because he came to actually *know* the God that he once only knew *about*. This is why he, and multitudes more, were "faithful unto death."⁸

One day, you and I will also be thrown to the lions. If God allows us to live to a ripe old age, our bodies will become ravaged with time, and we will face the yawning teeth of death. Not too many of us will have a pleasant demise. Most will be ripped apart by some terrible disease, until the ferocious beast of death devours what's left of our bodies.

Such thoughts are not pleasant, but they are true to life. Are you ready for that brutal attack? How deep is your faith in God? Can you say from your own conviction that the Holy Spirit has regenerated you? Does the evident fruit in your life reveal that you are born of God? Don't give a quick answer. This question is far too important for you to give a thoughtless, "I'm okay. I believe in God," or "I have given my heart to Jesus." The Bible warns in Matthew 7:21-23 that there will be many who, on the Day of Judgment, will cry out to Jesus, "Lord, Lord!" But He will say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you that work iniquity." Can you imagine the horror of that happening to you? On that fearful day there will be a huge category of people who will say that they knew the Lord, but they were in truth "hypocrites."⁹ A hypocrite may deceive friends and family, but he can never deceive God. What is really happening, is that he is deceiving himself.

Maybe, like millions of others, you have made a commitment to Christ but you didn't have a Road to Damascus experience. Or perhaps you don't even know the date you decided to follow the Savior. That doesn't matter. What matters is the present. Where are you at this very moment? If your heart gave out right now, how would you respond in those few moments that your life drained from you—in absolute trust, or total terror? Don't deceive yourself any further by saying, "That would never happen to me." Human nature tends to think that way—that death is something that happens to other people. But every single day 150,000 people die, and no doubt each of them that are now

in eternity, thought just like you—that death "will never happen to me."

Please, think about the day death comes to you. Let your imagination work for you for a moment. A massive crowd of demons is calling for your blood. You stand helplessly in front of the vicious jaws of death. It opens wide its mouth. Can you face it with courage? Is your conversion experience that real? Are you ready?

Be wise. Examine yourself, and see if you are in the faith.¹⁰ If you are not, then don't be like this godless world and leave yourself vulnerable to the ultimate of life's terrors. Get on your knees today—right now, and let the Ten Commandments search out your secret sins. Have you put God first? Have you made a god in your own image? Have you ever blasphemed His name? Or looked with unclean sexual desires? Ask God to shine a spotlight on your heart and remind you of those things that you have thought and done that He saw. Nothing is hidden from His eyes. He even sees the darkness as pure light. Realize that if God gave you justice, you would end up in Hell for eternity. We only get one chance in this thing we call "life." Don't blow it for eternity. Confess your sins to God. Name them. Be sorry for them. Plead with Him to open your understanding to the great truth that God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.¹¹ Make your calling and election sure,¹² until you can say with the apostle Paul, "For me to live is Christ. To die is gain."¹³ Then your love for God will become so real, *you couldn't deny it even if you wanted to*. That was the kind of unwavering faith that gave courage to stand before the lion. You need that same faith today.

Then take a moment to go to ExamineYourself.com and click on Save Yourself Some Pain. There you will find information to help you grow in the faith.

¹ Acts 17:31

² Romans 3:21

³ Matthew 5:28

⁴ Revelation 21:8

⁵ 1 John 3:15

⁶ Mark 1:15b

⁷ Romans 10:13

⁸ Revelation 2:10

⁹ Mark 7:6

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 13:5

¹¹ Romans 5:8

¹² 2 Peter 1:10

¹³ Philippians 1:21