

Don't Waste Your Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 October 2020

Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] Brother Fred, thank you for your kind invitation. I don't get a lot of invitation to come back a second time, so I'm very grateful for that.

As we prepare our hearts this morning to look together at God's Word, would you join me as we pray? Heavenly Father, thank you for just the privilege every time we're able to gather as a body of believers to join our hearts in worship, to be reminded that none of us would be here today were it not for your amazing grace.

And Father, out of that awareness, I pray today that we just present ourselves before you in humility and Lord, in all emptying of self to just sit before your Word today.

And we pray that your Holy Spirit would be the one who teaches us this morning. And I pray that this Word that we hold in our hands this morning, paper and ink, this written Word.

Lord, I pray that it will now become a living Word in our hearts today. Speak to us. May we be good stewards of every moment you give us.

[1 : 29] In this time together, it's the prayer that we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. He was considered by many to be the fastest man in the world.

They called him the Flying Scotchman. He was 22 years old. And in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, France, Eric Little was to have competed in the 100-meter dash.

Again, he was the fastest man at that particular race, fully expected to win the gold medal. But Eric Little was also a Christian.

He was a strong believer. And just a few days before the 100-meter dash was to have been run, he discovered that the qualifying heats for that event were going to be held on a Sunday.

And Eric Little had strong convictions about the Lord's Day. And he determined if those qualifying heats were going to be run on a Sunday, he could not participate. Now, as you might imagine, a great uproar followed that decision.

[2 : 37] The Olympic Committee in that day got together, held an emergency meeting, called Eric Little in and said, Look, man, everybody's eyes are on you.

You've got to run this race. Race, he said, No, I can't do it. He was summoned to a personal meeting with the Prince of Wales who had come to watch that race and was told again, Eric, we need you to run.

He said, I cannot run. Finally, Eric Little received a telegram from the Prime Minister of Great Britain, giving him an ultimatum, in essence.

Eric, you don't have a choice. You have got to compete in this race. But he stood firm. He did not run. And many people looked at Eric Little and said, What a waste.

You have given up fame. You have probably given up fortune. You have certainly given up the gold medal, which everyone realizes you could have won.

[3 : 42] And yet, this young man at 24 years of age determined that nothing was more important in his life than his relationship with Jesus Christ.

And he would not do anything that he considered would compromise his stance for Jesus Christ. So he did not run that race. He did not win that gold medal.

But his commitment and his conviction stirred a generation. And many people looked at what Eric Little did and were moved to follow Christ and this young man's example.

This morning, I want to ask you a question. Where are the radicals for Jesus Christ today?

Where are they? Where are those who would stand up today and say, I boldly proclaim that there is nothing in my life more precious to me than my relationship with Christ, than living for His glory.

[4 : 57] And I want to ask you this morning, just right out of the gate, would you be willing to be that kind of person?

I don't know any day there has ever been when we need more Eric Littles who will stand up with conviction and proclaim my life belongs to Christ fully, finally, forever.

I have given my life to Him. Today, I I sort of want to get in your face a little bit.

Is that okay? Just get in your face a little bit this morning and try to give you something to live for. I want to give you something to live for because I am convinced every one of us, you this morning, are standing on the precipice of a great adventure, if you will take it.

And I don't want you to waste your lives in a valley of insignificance. I do not want you to fall prey to what I have called the mind-numbing, spiritual, anesthetizing, destiny-dimming enticement of the American dream that simply says to you and me today, if you'll just get a good education, if you'll get a good job, if you'll raise a good family, if you'll live a good life, then you'll have a good time and your life will be a good life.

[6 : 45] Can I tell you this morning unhesitatingly, you were created for something more than that. In fact, you were created for a whole lot more than that.

So I want to say to you this morning, whether you're a student with the majority of your life ahead of you, or whether you've already retired and trying to figure out how you can make the most of your final years, I want to point you to something this morning.

So I want you to take your copy of God's Word as you have it there with you, or maybe you're going to look this up on your phone or some other device. I want you to look with me at a couple of verses in 1 Corinthians 6.

Let me just say to you, if we really understand what these verses say, they may be some of the scariest, most intimidating verses in all of the New Testament.

But we're going to look at them anyway. 1 Corinthians 6, verses 19 and 20. 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20, parts of these verses.

[8 : 04] I want you to listen to what Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes to you and to me. Now, you belong to God.

You do not belong to yourselves. God has bought you with a great price.

Hear that again. Now, you belong to God. You do not belong to yourselves.

Why? Because God has bought you with a great price. Do you understand this morning? If you are a Christian, if you would stand here and dare to name the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, do you understand you are not your own?

You do not belong to yourself. It is not your life. Christ bought you. He bought me at the price of His own death so that now we doubly belong to God.

[9 : 16] We belong to God, number one, because He created every single one of us. And then if we are believers, we belong to God because Christ purchased us.

He purchased our salvation at the price of His death on the cross. And that means my life is no longer my life to do with however I want to do with it.

Your life is not your life to do whatever you want to do with it. I've heard people say before, you know, you grow up in America, you can become anything you want to be.

Can we stop telling our kids that lie if we are followers of Christ? Christ. You can become anything God wants you to become.

You can do anything God wants you to do because your life is not your own to do with what you want to do with and neither is mine. We're not free to chart our own course, pursue our own desires, chase our own dreams.

[10 : 19] Restricting, huh? A little bit. Boxes you in, doesn't it? Cramps your style, infringes on your freedom, right?

I mean, that's what the world will tell us. That's what it told Eric Little. But this morning, can we look for just a moment at what God's Word really has to say about this?

And I want to illustrate this 1 Corinthians text in several ways. First of all, I want to illustrate it by looking at the life of a man in Scripture.

His name was Epaphroditus. We find his story in Philippians chapter 2. So, I encourage you to mark 1 Corinthians chapter 6, but turn over into the New Testament.

A few books here. To Philippians. And we're going to look for just a moment at Epaphroditus. Now, this is the only place in Scripture we find Epaphroditus mentioned, but he is memorialized here.

[11 : 25] He is ensconced because of what we see about him in this text. Now, before we look at the verses describing his life a little bit, let me give you a little bit of a background to this book of Philippians.

Epaphroditus was a member of the church at Philippi. the Philippian church had heard that Paul was in prison in Rome.

That's where Paul was when he wrote the book of Philippians. And so, the church at Philippi determined that it would come together, it would take up a collection, an offering, and they would send it to Paul in Rome, and Epaphroditus was the one who was given the task to take that gift to Paul in Rome.

As a matter of fact, we might say that the book of Philippians is sort of Paul's extended thank you letter to the church at Philippi for the sending of this gift to him in prison in Rome.

So, Epaphroditus is tasked with this responsibility. He is taking this gift from the Philippian church to Rome somewhere on the journey from Philippi to Rome or perhaps after he got to Rome, we don't really know.

[12 : 36] but Epaphroditus became seriously ill. We don't know what the illness was that he had, but if you look at verse 27, you will see of Philippians chapter 2, you will see that it was serious enough that the man almost died.

And so, the Philippian church was concerned about Epaphroditus. Somehow, they had gotten word that he was at the point of death. So, after he recovers a little bit, Paul says in verse 28, I'm going to send Epaphroditus back to you so that he can be with you, he can be with his family, he can be with his church family, and can recover.

So, that's the background. What I want you to see here, the verses, verses 29 and 30, because this tells us something of Epaphroditus that is really the focus of what I'm trying to help all of us come to terms with today.

Verse 29, Paul says, as he sends Epaphroditus back, so receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Now, there's a little key phrase here that Paul uses to describe Epaphroditus. He says, he risked his life.

[13 : 58] He risked his life. Now, in the common language of the people in Paul's day, that little phrase, risking his life, was borrowed from the gambling world.

It was a gambler's term. It meant to place a bet. It meant to make a wager. It meant to roll the dice.

Literally, Paul said, let me tell you about Epaphroditus. He was willing to gamble his own life for the sake of Christ.

He threw himself out there on the game board of life. He rolled the dice with his life and he literally risked losing it all to do what Christ had called him to do.

Epaphroditus was God's gambler. And he gambled everything because he placed his very life on the line to do what Christ had called him to do.

[15 : 13] I want to tell you about one of my favorite historical Christian characters. characters. Her name was Ann Hazeltine.

She was the youngest of five children and she was doted on by her family. She had a wonderfully happy childhood and by her teenage years she was sparkling, full of joy, popular, very attractive, always in demand at parties and all kinds of social events.

in her youth. Her main concerns were her friends, socializing, having fun. Her father actually constructed on the back of their house a dance hall, a big room that was used just for dancing so Ann's home really became the center of social life in the town where they lived.

Now like most of the people who lived in that small town, the Hazeltines went to church. But religion was, it just wasn't very demanding at all.

Didn't require much of them and most of their time was spent just doing what they wanted to do, having fun, being with friends. So in Ann's own words she said, you know, I was consumed with the things of the world.

[16 : 42] Even though I profess to follow Christ, I know my focus was on the things of the world, having fun. I was largely directed by peer pressure. And so I want to read a few things to you this morning that come from her diary.

And I'm just going to read it off this sheet of paper because I want you to hear verbatim what Ann wrote about her understanding of Christianity at this young point in her life. Here's what she said, quote, During the first 16 years of my life, I very seldom felt any serious impressions about anything.

I was early taught by my mother, though at that time she was ignorant of the nature of true religion. I was taught by her the importance of abstaining from those vices like telling falsehoods, disobeying my parents, taking what was not my own.

She also taught me that if I was a good child, when I died, I would escape that dreadful place called hell, the thought of which sometimes filled me with alarm and terror.

So, I therefore made it a matter of conscience to avoid these kinds of sins. I'd say my prayer every night and every morning. I would try not to do the things that I knew were wrong, never doubting that such a course of conduct would ensure my salvation.

[18 : 05] At the age of 12 or 13, I attended the academy where suddenly as I was exposed to many more temptations than ever before. I now began to go to dances and parties.

I found my mind completely occupied with the things of the world. And for two or three years, I scarcely felt an anxious thought at all relative to the salvation of my own soul.

Even though, now listen, even though, I was rapidly heading towards eternal ruin. I was surrounded by my friends who were wild and volatile like myself.

And I often thought myself, one of the happiest people on earth. My time mostly occupied with clothes, boys, and an amusement.

That was her life. That was her own assessment of her life at 16 years of age. Now, she went on to say that from time to time she would sort of be convicted about things in her life.

[19 : 07] She knew she was doing things she had no business doing, involved with people she shouldn't have been with. But because of peer pressure and her desire to be popular, she said, you know, I was just, it was too embarrassing for me to try to take a stand for Christ or to really get too serious about spiritual things or try to be godly.

But then, as a 17-year-old girl, Anne Hazeltine had a personal, powerful encounter with Jesus Christ that radically changed her life.

Suddenly, she was overwhelmed with a sense of her own guilt before this holy and righteous God. she said, I suddenly became aware of His majesty, His holiness, His greatness, the grace that He had extended to me.

And I became overwhelmed with my own sinfulness and suddenly I just had this consuming desire for my life to bring glory to God. So at 17 years of age, she set out to live her life in complete commitment to the Lord.

And she said, Lord, here it is, whatever you want to do. She said, what Epaphroditus said, here's my life, I roll it out there. Let me tell you what happened. Anne Hazeltine eventually married a man by the name of Adoniram Judson.

[20 : 42] I don't know if that name means anything to you or not. If you know anything about mission history whatsoever. Adoniram Judson was one of the first Protestant missionaries sent out from North America to the non-Christian world.

He was one of the great missionary pioneers. And so, Anne ended up getting to know Judson and they decided to get married.

Let me read a part of a letter to you now that Adoniram Judson wrote to Anne Hazeltine's father asking for her hand in marriage and also asking permission to take Anne with him as a missionary to India.

Now, if you're a father out there with a daughter, I want you to listen to the... It ought to impact every one of us, but I want you to listen to what Adoniram Judson wrote to Anne Hazeltine's father. I have to ask you now whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring to see her never again in this world.

Whether you can consent to her departure, her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life, whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India, to every kind of want and distress, to degradation, insult, persecution, perhaps even a violent death.

[22 : 12] Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you? Can you do this for the sake of perishing immortal souls, for the sake of heaven, for the sake of the glory of God?

Can you consent to all this in the hope of soon meeting your daughter again, not in this world, but in the world of glory with the crown of righteousness brightened with the acclamations of praise that shall resound from her Savior, from those heathen people saved through her testimony from eternal woe and despair?

What questions? Her father said what I would have probably said. I can't do that, but I will let her make up her decision.

Anne said yes. I will go. And Anne and Adoniram Judson went to India.

There they lost three of their children. Adoniram himself was thrown into a Burmese prison where he languished for two years.

[23 : 35] Anne herself at 37 years of age died in Burma. Her body wracked by pain, ravaged by tropical illnesses, emaciated from lack of proper food, beaten down by the struggles of pioneer missionary life just as her husband Ad predicted would happen.

But Anne helped to translate the books of Daniel and Jonah into the Burmese language, the gospel of Matthew into the Thai language, so that multiplied thousands of Burmese and Thai people could come to know the Christ that she knew.

She rolled the dice. She gambled her life. She said, Lord, there is nothing more precious to me than living for your glory.

I do not belong to myself. You have bought me with a great price. I throw myself out. You use me however you want to use me. Now here's the question.

Is that something you have ever seriously seriously in your entire life considered doing? Would you be an Anne Hazeltine for this generation?

[25 : 12] Would you be an Epaphroditus for this day? Would you consider that God may have brought you into His kingdom for such a time as this?

Would you be an Eric Little for this generation? Can I say to you this morning that I believe Christianity has largely lost its teeth in America?

There is no risk. we play it safe. We know exactly what we're going to do each and every day that we live. We're not throwing ourselves out there for the sake of Christ.

There is no challenge. There is no costly commitment. There is no great courage. There is no great cause that we consider worth this kind of price.

There is very little in our culture or in the church of Jesus Christ today that is driving us to be all that this word says we ought to be.

[26 : 33] So can I just be a voice today? Maybe it is a voice crying in the wilderness. I do not know, but could I say, could I throw out to you this morning this possibility? Would you embrace being everything that this word says Christ created and bought you to be?

Would you hear me say to you, don't waste these few precious years, this tiny increment of time that God has entrusted to you.

Don't waste your life. Now listen, I understand this morning, I'm not naive, and I understand this morning that from the perspective and the values and the priorities of this world, what looks like a waste is to give yourself to Christ in this kind of way.

That's what looks like a waste in the eyes of the world. It looks stupid, tragic. It's a waste because becoming a follower of Christ means sacrifice.

It calls us to embrace suffering. It tells us we're going to face persecution and loss in this world. Over and over and over again in the New Testament we see that. If anyone would come after me, Jesus said, let him deny himself.

[27 : 53] Say a big fat no to your own life. Let him deny himself, then take up a cross. That's not the shiny little emblem we wear around our necks. It was a Roman execution device.

That's what everybody understood when Jesus said, if you want to follow me, be ready to take up a cross. Be ready to give everything that you have even in your own life if you want to follow me. That's what Jesus said.

He has called us to a life in the eyes of the world of a seemingly pointless denial of many of the things we think make our short lives here on earth tolerable.

He calls us to walk a path that leads in the opposite direction that everybody else is going in. I'm going to tell you, identifying with Christ, risking your life in this kind of way can involve the loss of reputation, it can involve the loss of intellectual respectability, it can include the loss of status according to the world's version of wisdom and honor.

Looks like a waste of life. But it's really the very opposite. Jesus said if you want to gain your life, lose it.

[29 : 06] I'll tell you how to lose it. Try to hang on to your life. Try to do it your way. You'll lose your life. You'll come to the end of your life and you'll look back and you'll have a pot full of regrets and you'll yearn for what might have been in your service to the Lord Jesus Christ and how he might have taken your life and used it as a vehicle for his glory.

You know what? I didn't finish the story about Eric Little. Let me go back to that. After Eric Little decided he would not run in the 100 meter dash because of his convictions about running on a Sunday, a teammate of his on the British Olympic team, a man by the name of Harold Abrams came up to him and said, Eric, I'd be willing to switch events with you.

I run the 400 meter race. Why don't I run that and you run the 100? And I'll run the 100. See, Harold Abrams was a Jewish man. And so he didn't have any convictions about running on a Sunday.

It wasn't a big deal to him. Problem was, Eric Little had never trained to run the 400 meters. 100 meter was more of a sprint.

The 400 meter was a long distance race. He just hadn't trained for that. Had never run that race before. Inexperienced. But hey, the opportunity was there and he took it.

[30 : 35] And so they switched events. Before Eric Little got ready to run that 400 meter race, another athlete from the American Olympic team, who was also a Christian, and who also understood the kind of sacrifice that Eric Little had made, came up to him right before he started that race and handed him a little piece of paper paper and on it was scribbled a short note.

You know what it said? God honors those who honor him. Do you believe that? God honors those who honor him.

Eric Little not only won the 400 meter and gained that gold medal, but he set a world's record. That stood for a decade. And he became a national hero.

Everybody wanted to be around Eric Little. They revered him in Great Britain. He could have had anything that he wanted.

He could have yelled jump and all of Great Britain would have said, okay, how high? That's the status that he held after winning that 400 meter. But exactly one year after winning that gold medal, Eric Little walked away from everything to become a missionary with the London Missionary Society.

[32 : 15] And he went to China. And he carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the back country of that great nation. about that time, Japan invaded China.

Second World War broke out. Eric Little was captured by the Japanese, declared to be an enemy national, thrown into a prison camp. There he was one of 1,300 prisoners crammed into an area maybe a little bit bigger than this worship area.

Housed in dormitories three feet by six feet. He was beaten. He was starved. He was denied adequate medical care.

He was physically abused and mentally abused. But still, he held athletic competitions. He taught hymns. And he shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with his fellow prisoners and with his Japanese captors.

Just one month before the liberation of China, February 21, 1945, Eric Little died in that prisoner of war camp.

[33 : 26] Largely unknown. Was it a waste? Well, it would have been a waste.

In fact, let me just be honest with you. Everything I've shared with you this morning would be a waste if what the Bible has to say about Jesus Christ is not true.

If what is in this book is not true, then yes, it is all a waste. But if what is in this book is true, if Jesus Christ is the very Son of God who in love for you and me willingly set aside the glory and the status that was His, with His heavenly Father in heaven, if He took on the full measure of our weakness and was born into the human family, if He lived a life of perfect obedience to His Father's will, if He died a sinless death on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and my sin, if He rose from the dead, if He ascended to the Father, if today He really is the Savior of all who trust in Him, if one day He is going to return to this earth and receive His people to Himself and assume His rightful role as judge over all the earth, King of kings and Lord of lords, if what this book has to say about Christ is true and it is true, then my friend, there is no price in the world that is too great to pay for

Him. There is no loss in the terms of what is valuable in the eyes of the world, no loss too much to endure for Him. Before Anne Hazeltine left the shores of America to sail for India and Burma where she died, this is what she had to say.

I'll close with these final words from her diary. I have at length come to the conclusion that I must spend my days in a foreign land, but I am a creature of God and He has an undoubted right to do with me as seems good in His sight.

[35 : 53] I rejoice because I am in His hands and when I am called to face danger, to pass through scenes of terror and distress, He will inspire me with fortitude.

He will enable me to trust in Him because Jesus is faithful. His promises are precious. Were it not for these considerations, I should sink down in the depths of despair, especially as no female has to my knowledge ever left the shores of America to spend her life among the heathen in this way, nor do I yet know that I shall have a single female companion where I'm going.

But whether I spend my days in India or America, I will spend them in the service of my God and my Savior and look forward to spending an eternity in His presence.

Folks, this is hard for us to hear. But this is not a higher life. This is not a deeper life.

This is normal Christianity. Normal Christianity. It seems radical to us because we have departed so far from what Christ calls us to be and do in this book.

[37 : 30] So because it seems radical to us, I will ask the question, where are the radicals for Jesus Christ today? Who would rise up and say nothing, nothing, nothing in my life is more precious to me than Christ, than living for His glory?

Will you be one of those? Wow. Do we need some Ann Hazeltines today? Do we need some Eric Littles today?

Do we need some more folks who in the spirit of Epaphroditus would say, Lord, here's my life and I will roll the dice, not knowing what all that means, but here is my life today.

I give you all of me for the sake of multiplied billions of people who are dying every day without knowing this Savior that we know. Would you be that kind of person for this generation?

Isaac Watts wrote a famous hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. And in the closing stanza of that verse, he captured exactly the truth of Scripture.

[38 : 52] And I share these words with you in closing this morning. Isaac Watts said, were the whole realm of nature mine. If I had everything a person could possibly have, were the whole realm of nature mine, that would be a present far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we stand this morning underneath the authority of your word and the truth that it proclaims.

And I pray in these moments, Father, now that we have heard, we might recognize our accountability to you for what you have entrusted to us through the pages of your word.

And Lord, through that great cloud of witnesses, those who have gone on before us, like Epaphroditus, like Eric Little, like Anne Hazeltine, who now from the grandstands of heaven cheer us on.

[40 : 32] But even these examples pale in comparison to the example of our Lord Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, who took on human form and human flesh and came and dwelt among us, leaving the glory and the splendor of heaven behind.

who took on human form and human flesh and being made in human likeness and being made in appearance as a man, taking on the form of a servant.

He humbled Himself. He poured Himself out and He became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. That is our ultimate example. That is the one to whom we give our lives.

And so, Father, I pray this morning that as we prepare in just a couple of minutes to walk out the doors of this building, that we would not walk out the same way we walked in.

That we would be Your gamblers. That we would make the wager, place the bet, roll the dice with our own lives and just say, Lord, here we are.

[41 : 56] We roll ourselves out before You. Our lives are not our own. We have been bought with a great price. Now take us and use us to make a difference here in Pickens, South Carolina, in a nation that desperately needs to know the difference that only Jesus Christ can make and among the nations is the prayer that we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.