

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 10 January 2022.

Greetings.

This is your weekly 'Musings' email from me.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

'He is no fool ...'.

The background.

This past Saturday, 8th January, marked the anniversary of the deaths, in 1956, of the five young missionaries in Ecuador.

You may not be able to quote the names of all five young men who gave their lives on 8th January 1956, when Waodani (otherwise spoken of as Aucas – 'Savages') warriors speared them on so-called 'Palm Beach' in the rainforest of Ecuador but I am confident that you will, at least, recognise the name of Jim Elliott.

The five missionaries, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, Peter Fleming and Roger Youderian, ventured into Ecuador to make contact with the isolated tribe. Nate Saint was a pilot with Missionary Aviation Fellowship and the five used Nate's plane to drop gifts to the Waodani tribe people below to build trust with them.

Soon after, they flew to an area near the Waodani village and landed at 'Palm Beach'. Despite some encouraging initial meetings, they were all killed at that beach when the tribesmen attacked with spears a few days later.

Of the five, Jim Elliot is, no doubt, by far the best known, in part at least because of the writings of his widow, Elisabeth Elliott. Among her many books (she wrote almost 30), one of the most widely read was *'Shadow of the Almighty'*. Published in 1958, this book was subtitled *'The life and testimony of Jim Elliot'*.

We owe to Elisabeth Elliott not only many biographical details of her husband but also many of his quotable sayings.

The quotation.

Perhaps, the most famous quotation associated with Jim Elliot's name is:

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose'.

These memorable words echo many times through *'Shadow of the Almighty'*, from the 'Prologue' on page 15 to the 'Epilogue' on page 311.

The words are quoted from one of Jim Elliot's personal journals (published in 1978 by Elisabeth Elliott). The entry (dated 28 October 1949) reads, *'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. Lu 16:9 "... that when it shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations'.* (I attach a copy of the actual journal entry as *'Jim Elliot's Journal Entry, 'He is no fool ...'*.)

That quotation is universally associated today with the name 'Jim Elliot'.

But, in my view, when Jim Elliot penned those words, he was quoting somebody else.

The facts run as follows:

1. Jim Elliot was an avid reader of Christian biographies and refers to many of these in his journals. Only four days before his 'He is no fool' entry, he wrote, 'I sense the value of Christian biography tonight' and proceeded to refer to four separate biographical volumes from which he had benefited ... those concerning (i) David Brainerd, missionary to native American Indians; (ii) J. G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides; and – separately – (iii) Jonathan Goforth and (iv) James Hudson Taylor, missionaries to China.

2. Words more-or-less identical to those in Jim Elliot's journal were written almost three hundred years earlier in the biography of a much-used servant of God. That man's name was Philip Henry. Mr Henry lived in the 1600s and was the father of the well-known Bible commentator, Matthew Henry.

In Matthew Henry's biographical account of his father's life, he notes that his father's practice, while minister in Worthenbury, England, was to set aside a proportion of his income for charitable purposes, notably the relief of the poor. He then says of his father, 'To encourage himself and others to works of charity, he would say—"**He is no fool who parts with that which he cannot keep, when he is sure to be recompensed with that which he cannot lose**".' (Quoted from, 'The Life of the Rev. Philip Henry, A. M.', Holdsworth, 1825, page 53.)

3. A theologian of much earlier times is credited with a very similar saying. Thomas Watson, the Puritan, exhorts his readers, 'Remember that excellent saying of Augustine, "**Give those things to the poor which you cannot keep that you may receive those things which you cannot lose**".' (Source: Thomas Watson, 'The Beatitudes', page 71.)

And this saying, mark you, is attributed to Augustine of Hippo (the so-called 'Church Father'), who wrote some 1,300 years before Philip Henry and some 1,600 years before Jim Elliot.

Coincidence, do you think? Or was Jim Elliot familiar with either (or both) of these earlier sayings ... or, possibly, was familiar with some other source which quoted either (or both) of them?

To my mind, the evidence (from Jim Elliot's associated reference in his journal entry to our Lord's words in Luke 16 verse 9) suggests most strongly that, when he penned his now-famous saying, Jim Elliot (in company with both Augustine and Philip Henry) had in mind particularly the eternal benefits to be 'gained' by the believer from giving to the poor.

But you and I know One unspeakably greater than Augustine, Philip Henry or Jim Elliot, who repeatedly stressed that treasures in heaven are laid up when treasures on earth are given up (Matt. 6. 20; 19. 21; Mark 10. 21; Luke 12. 33; 18. 22).

[Christ ... magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death \(Phil. 1. 20\).](#)

Let me make two things clear:

(i) the now-famous quotation, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose', conveys a profound – and soul-searching – truth, and

(ii) **it is unimportant whether or not Jim Elliott was the first to pen these words. What is important is that Jim Elliot lived out the truth of them.**

In saying, 'Jim Elliot lived out the truth of them', I am reminded of something which Elisabeth Elliot wrote not long after Jim's death:

'He and the other men with whom he died were hailed as heroes, "martyrs". I do not approve. Nor would they have approved. *Is the distinction between living for Christ and dying for Him, after all, so great?*'

(Source: Elisabeth Elliot, 'Shadow of the Almighty', page 12.)

I have little doubt that Jim Elliot's widow would have 'approved' most heartedly of the sentiments expressed in the following poem:

So he died for his faith. That is fine.
More than most of us do.
But stay; can you add to that line
That he lived for it too?

It is easy to die. Men have died
For a wish or a whim --
From bravado, from passion or pride;
Was it harder for him?

But to live; every day to live out
All the truth that he dreamt,
While his friends met his conduct with doubt,
And the world with contempt --

Was it thus that he plodded ahead,
Never turning aside?
**Then we'll talk of the life that he led,
Never mind how he died.**

(Attributed widely to Ernest Howard Crosby (1856–1907), who is reputed to be a relative of Fanny Crosby.)

I was interested to discover, from Jim Elliot's journal, that it was on 29th October 1949 (the day following his famous 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose' entry) that he posted a letter in which, as he wrote at the time, 'I responded to a simple urge within me to offer myself for the work there [in the jungle of east Ecuador]!'

Little did he know that that simple action would lead, in a little over six years' time, to his laying down his life ... in one sense, to his giving what he could not keep!

An earlier journal entry (on 18 April 1948) included the prayer, 'Father, *take my life, yea, my blood, if Thou wilt*, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it, for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord, have it all'. Today, 10 January 2022, is sixty-six years (almost to the day) since God answered that prayer.

Three details.

But, before we leave the quotation itself and Jim Elliot's journal entry, I want to draw attention to a few details.

First, Jim Elliot's rendering of Luke 16 verse 9. He quotes it as '... that when it shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations'. I have been able to trace no published Bible translation (then or now) which renders the verse in exactly that form. (The Revised Version of 1881, 'that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles', is the nearest I can get.) I suspect (but cannot prove) that Jim Elliot quoted his own translation of the Greek text; he graduated from Wheaton College in 1949, with a degree in Greek.

Second, I endorse the view of many that both the green asterisk and the red underlining on the journal entry were added after his death. I do not believe that he himself attached any special significance to the entry.

Third, the journal entry clearly links the now famous saying with Luke 16 verse 9. (This squares with the 'responsibility-to-care-for-the-poor' context in which the similar sayings are found in the cases of both Augustine and Philip Henry.)

In that the words from Luke 16 verse 9 convey the explanation given by the Lord Jesus of the meaning and application of the preceding parable (that of the so-called 'Unjust Steward'), it will do none of us any harm to dig a little into that parable ... well, apart, possibly, from the harm which it will do to our purses or wallets! (See the attached, '*No fool, the dry wallet*', picture.)

The parable.

I am, therefore, taking the liberty of attaching a document (['Malcolm's Monday Musings 82 - 'The Parable of the Unjust Steward, Luke 16. 1-13'](#)) which aims to expound that parable.

(The document reproduces a two-part expository article which appeared over ten years ago in the Precious Seed magazine and is reproduced with kind permission of Precious Seed International. You will recognise the reference made on page 7 of the document to the 'cannot lose' sayings of Jim Elliot, Philip Henry and Augustine of Hippo!

The original articles can be accessed freely at: https://www.preciousseed.org/article_detail.cfm?articleID=2843 and https://www.preciousseed.org/article_detail.cfm?articleID=2868.)

Two further quotations.

But I am not done yet.

The following are two relevant extracts from the document (*'All things ... for good'*) which accompanied the Monday Musings at the end of last May. Both are well worth re-reading and pondering.

(i) 'On the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the five young men, the brother of one of the five, Ken Fleming, himself a missionary, reported:

"Their sacrifice has had a life-changing effect on tens of thousands, and has had some effect on millions of others ... During the World Conference on Evangelism at Amsterdam in 2000, Steve Saint

[the son of Nate Saint, another of the five] and his father's (now converted) killer, Mincaye, were among the ... delegates from all over the world. While there, Steve and Mincaye had opportunity to ask the crowd if any of them had made life-changing decisions as a result of the sacrifice made ... in Ecuador in 1956.

"They could hardly believe it when at least 3,000 stood to their feet! And these were "life-changing" decisions remember".

(Source: Ken Fleming, 'What is the Point of this Waste?' Echoes of Service magazine, June 2006, pages 253, 255.)

(ii) 'One of the so-called "Five Ecuador Martyrs" was Nate Saint, the team's "Jungle Pilot". Let me quote you the testimony of Nate Saint's son, Steve, who was just five years old when his father was martyred. Steve wrote in 2005:

"I have personally paid a high price for what happened on Palm Beach. But I have also had a front-row seat as the rest of the story has been unfolding for half a century. I have seen first-hand that much good has come from it.

"I believe only God could have fashioned such an incredible story from such a tragic event. I could not begin to record the thousands of people who have told me that God used what happened on Palm Beach to change the course of their lives for good ... If I could go back now and rewrite the script, I would not change a single scene. I have come to understand that life is too complex and much too short to let amateurs direct the story. I would rather let the Master Storyteller do the writing".

(Source: Steve Saint, 'The End of the Spear', pages 59-60).

Tears!

The five missionary widows were certainly not the only ones to shed tears over the death of the five young men. Many joined them at the time, and many more have since.

It may sound strange but I leave you today with what I can only call, '*an inspiring typo*'.

This past Wednesday evening, I received an email from a sister who, together with her husband, worked for many years as a missionary in Kenya and who now lives with him in the United States. She wrote to give an update on their experience of 'the Lord's goodness in 2021'.

The 'inspiring typo' came in the text of Scripture which headed the email. Instead of reading, 'You crown the **year** with your goodness' (Psa. 65. 11), it read, '**You crown the tear with your goodness**' (emphasis mine).

I suspect that Elisabeth Elliot would have endorsed that. She once wrote:

'I believe with all my heart that God's story has a happy ending ... But not yet, not necessarily yet. It takes faith to hold onto that in the face of the great burden of experience, which seems to prove otherwise. **What God means by ... goodness is a far higher thing than we can conceive**'.

(Quoted from Ellen Vaughn, '*Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*', page 260.)

'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose'.

