

## Christ among wild Beasts

### Isaiah 11:5-9

<sup>5</sup> *Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.*  
<sup>6</sup> *“ The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them.  
<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt nor destroy  
in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.*

### Mark 1:12-13

*Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.*

There is no shortage of imagery found in the scene where Christ was born. He is the Lamb God born in a lambing place, visited, first of all by shepherds, the guardians of little lambs. We are not told that there were animals at the manger that night but it seems appropriate that they would have been there. He has come to bring us back to the garden. Isaiah tells us that the full force of the peace he will ultimately bring to the earth will go beyond the transformation of human governance to the changing of interspecies relationships. The lion will lay down with the lamb. The little child will play in the adder’s den, so we are promised. The apostle Paul tells us that all creation groans inwardly for the day of their redemption. And so the promise is for peace on earth... and peace to all **on** that earth... Even the animals!

At the beginning of Christ’s public ministry, following his baptism, we are told that he was forty days in the wilderness, tempted of Satan. Matthew and Luke’s accounts of this event are the fullest. Mark’s is the shortest but Mark adds this phrase to the account, “*He...was with the wild animals/ beasts*” Every word of scripture has been placed there by God. This little phrase is not without purpose or meaning.

**Let us start by noting what kind of animals are these.** These are not the oxen and donkeys and sheep portrayed in the manger scenes. These are not animals you find in petting zoos. Nothing domesticated here. Mark is letting us know that Christ is in a desolate place, uninhabited by humans, inhabited by wild things. **1 Kings 13** tells us the story of a disobedient prophet who met a lion on the road and it that killed him. **2 Kings 17** tells of the king of Assyria transplanting foreigners and idol worshippers into the land of Israel and God sending out among them lions to kill them. **2 Kings 2** shares the account of 2 she bears that came out of the woods and tore to shreds **42** young boys.

These are the kind of beast you don’t want to come upon alone in the wilderness. They are wolves and jackals, Lions and leopards, bears and vipers and they are not friendly. You’ll find if you research it, easy access to information of deadly wolf attacks in every place where humans being have lived. Even to the present day. For example in India in one province in 1996 - 74 humans were maimed or killed by wolves. 100 years earlier the number was around 624 deaths in the same region. After the fall of the Soviet Empire a report was discovered that had been suppressed showing that in Russia mass numbers of people were killed by wolves after their guns had been confiscated by the government. In the days of the Old West people knew that wolves were more dangerous in Europe than in the wilds of the west. The reason was that the

rule of the west was “*have gun will travel.*” Jack London in one of his stories has his two heroes in their camp at night, in the wild, surrounded by a circle of gleaming eyes. One of the heroes says to the other, “*it’s an awful misfortune to be out of ammunition.*” Yes. Like that. Among those kind of man eaters was the Savior in the wild, with the wild animals for 40 days and 40 nights.

**But he had no ammunition.** King David was a shepherd. He protected his sheep from the attack of wild beasts. He boasted that he had killed both lions and bears in the wild. **Jesus David’s son is with the beast but he does not kill them and they do not kill him. How was it so?** Mark puts the phrase there because it is such an unlikely and astounding testament to the Savior. How did it come about? Let’s explore. I’ll suggest two ideas.

**1<sup>st</sup> It wasn’t a miracle of His own doing. It was an exercise in the dominion God intended humans to have.** You may recall that as Christ was tempted in the wilderness he refused to work miracles to confront or defeat the attack of the enemy. He faced his temptations like we do, in our own flesh. He did it without sin though. He was tempted when hungry to turn a stone into bread. He refused. He lived his life on earth in the condition of a man like ourselves. His miracles were performed to help others, deliver others, but not himself.

So what kept the wild beasts at bay? What kept these wild beasts from devouring him? F.W. Boreham has the best suggestion. **Jesus faced temptation as a human just like we do but he wasn’t a human just like we are. He was everything we were intended to be, before the fall. In the Garden of Eden you will remember that God gave to Adam dominion over all the creatures of the earth.** It was a dominion that was broken when Adam fell in sin. We now must outfox the fox to have dominion over him. Our words don’t command the fishes, we must lure them with hooks and bait. We scratch and claw and fight with sticks and stones and knives and guns to master the wild beasts and express our dominion over them. It is feeble at best and easily lost. But Christ was the man we were meant to be. He, not having sin, had not forfeited his authority over these creatures. We must fall back upon defenses to protect ourselves... He walked among them holding the dominion we once had and lost because of our sins. Boreham writes, “*The crown is fallen from our heads, and all things finned and furred and feathered mock us in our shame. But Thine, O Man of men, is the power and the dominion, and all the creatures of the wild obey Thee!*”

**2<sup>nd</sup> there is another idea as to why he survived those forty days among the beasts. I don’t think it is correct on Christ’s account but it does apply to us. The idea has merit though. You’ll have to decide for yourself. The idea is that Christ was God’s special lamb. And this lamb could walk among the wolves unscathed until the appointed time of his sacrifice for our sins.** Here the Angels minister their protection over the Lord Jesus just as they protected Daniel in the Lion’s den. Daniel is thrown in to the Lions for having prayed to God and not King Darius. A thirty period had been commanded of the king on the advice of his wise men, thirty days in which no prayers were to be made but to him alone. The offenders would be thrown to the lions. These Wiseman came up with this law because they knew Daniel would not keep it and they wanted Daniel out of the way. Daniel is caught praying to god and to lions he must go. Darius made the law and enforces it though he loves Daniel. The night passes. Darius comes back to the Den of the Lions and calls down, “*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver your from the lions?*” Daniel calls back,

*“O king live forever! My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me...”* We are told that the advisors who tricked the king into making that law were thrown into the same den and were devoured before their bodies hit the floor.

God’s angels protected Him. And it is true the Angels of God watch over God’s little sheep. Those shepherds who were in their fields keeping watch over their flocks by night. Why were they doing that? Well they were guarding those sheep from the wild beasts. The angels came to them with their announcement, *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”* And these shepherds left their sheep to go see the Christ child. Isn’t that a dereliction of duty? What about those prowling beast that would eat the sheep? My guess is that the angels left them with a promise... *we’ll minister to them. We will guard your sheep tonight.*

If the Angel guarded Daniel, and angels guarded the sheep that first Christmas night, then why not guard the Lamb of God those forty days. Maybe that is it as well. You know God is our protector isn’t he. Any dominion we have is an extension of His rule that he gives us. But overall He rules and overrules.

**I like both ideas so much I can hardly decide.** Either way I think these wild beast saw in Christ what others failed to see. They saw the coming King. They saw the one who would one day author their species full redemption from the stain of the curse. Here is the one who will one day roll back all fear and animosity and rage. **He will not only tame creation, He will transform it.** Their eyes met his with a prayer, the groan that all creation gives, for its final redemption.

Also I think they recognized in Him, veiled as he was in human flesh, they recognized their master. **It is good to know who has ultimate dominion over the wild beast isn’t it?**

We are told today that we live in a world with devils filled that threaten to undo us. We are told in the Bible that Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And we know the wild beasts are untamed and they threaten us. Life is full of threats. But they have no power but that which God has given them. And our ascended Christ... is the master of all. Their fangs... even the enemies fangs cannot reach us without God’s, our Savior’s permission.

**Remember that the beast ultimately did get at this Lamb of God.** That Satan that devouring lion took his bite at him on the cross and thought he was tearing that lamb to shreds. God seemed to have lifted his hand of control and to have failed to hold back the pack of demonic wolves, the men who acted beastly themselves as they tore in upon our Savior. But it wasn’t so... God still ruled over this pack of demonic and human beasts. He had his plan.

**Boreham** shares a lengthy quote listen, *“Today, said Amplonius, a teacher of the persecuted Roman Christians, ‘today, by the cruel order of Trajan, Ignatius was thrown to the wild beasts in the arena. He it was, my children, whom Jesus took, when as yet he was but a little child, and set him in the midst of the disciples and said, “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” And now, from the same Lord who that day laid his sacred hands upon his head, he has received the martyr crown. But Ignatius did not fear the beasts, my children. I have seen a letter which he wrote but yesterday to the aged Polycarp...*

*In it he says that the hungry creatures have no terrors for him. "Would to God" he said, "that I were come to the beasts prepared for me. I wish that, with their gaping mouths, they were now ready to rush upon me. Let the angry beasts tear asunder my limbs so that I may win Christ Jesus." Thus Ignatius wrote but yesterday to the beloved Polycarp; and today, with a face like the face of an angel, he gave himself to the wolves. We know not which of us shall suffer next, my children. The people are still crying wildly, "The Christians to the lions!" It may be that I, your teacher, shall be the next to witness for the faith. But let us remember that for forty days and forty nights Jesus was himself with the wild beasts, and not one of them dared to harm Him. And He is still with the wild beasts where we His people, are among them; and their cruel fangs can only tear us so far as it is for our triumph and His glory." Boreham adds, "So spake Amponius, and the Church was comforted."*

Those beasts are not just animals who go about on all fours. When Stephen was stoned we read that they rushed upon him 'nashing' their teeth. We face beastly situations and we feel often under the attack of vicious circumstances. Yet even here the promise of Jesus is, "*I am you're your always.*" Now should we his children be afraid of the bear in the market or the lion in the streets? Not as long as he is with us and we are with him.