

Drastic Measures

His surgery is scheduled for tomorrow morning (May 5, 2003) at St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, Colorado and his harrowing story has been carried in newspapers and on television around the world since this 27-year-old didn't show up for work in his hometown of Aspen on Tuesday morning. It's not the kind of celebrity anyone would willingly choose, to be sure.

It was just a matter of weeks ago he told the Aspen Times that, even though he has a mechanical engineering degree from Carnegie-Mellon University, he felt compelled to quit a budding but boring corporate career at Intel so he could throw himself into his lifelong love – mountaineering. And it was that intense passion that almost got him killed this week.

For this seasoned expert, it was only supposed to be a daylong adventure in the extreme sport of “canyoneering” that combines hiking and climbing up then down rugged, remote terrain, using rock climbing gear to negotiate narrow canyons. After solo winter expeditions to the summit of 49 of the 54 peaks in Colorado that are 14,000 feet and above since December 1998, a few hours hiking around Blue John Canyon in southeastern Utah's Canyonlands National Park seemed like a walk in the dark. But something went badly wrong this time for Aron Ralston.

Last Saturday afternoon (April 26, 2003), as the scrappy mountain climber moved through a three-foot-wide ‘slot canyon,’ he pushed his arm into a crack in the canyon wall and a 1000-pound slab of sandstone suddenly shifted and broke loose, crushing his right hand and forearm and pinning him in a horrifying, excruciating prison. He tried to use his ropes and anchors to free himself, but couldn't budge the massive boulder. Day turned to night and hours turned to days as Aron – who had narrowly escaped death in an avalanche in February – was forced to wait for the help that was unlikely to arrive. By Tuesday morning he had completely exhausted his water supply, and by Thursday morning – after five agonizing days of forced standing in the unforgiving elements of the remote Utah wilderness – he realized that drastic measures would have to be taken if he was going to survive.

Aron Ralston had only two choices as the sun rose over Blue John Canyon last Thursday morning: He could die with his arm trapped beneath a 1000-pound boulder, alone in the desert, or he could amputate his right arm with his own pocketknife.

Utah park ranger Steve Swanke was in awe: "I've never seen anybody who has [such a] will to live and is as much of a warrior as Aron is, and I've been doing this for 25 years."

Because of his strong desire to live, Ralston was somehow able to tie a tourniquet to his right arm, and then painstakingly do the unthinkable – crudely sever the crushed limb just below the elbow with his own knife. Once the grim task was done, he found a way to set up his climbing ropes and hooks, then rappelled 60 feet straight down a rock wall to the canyon floor, where he began the arduous trek back out to his vehicle.

That's where rescuers found him late Thursday afternoon, bloody and dehydrated, staggering along a stream. What was left of his right arm was still wrapped in the tourniquet, and he was only two miles from his car; he had walked seven miles with his wound. He was quickly airlifted out of the canyon by the rescue helicopter to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, where the veteran climber is still listed in serious condition.

Authorities and medical experts say that if Ralston had not cut off his arm to free himself, he would have surely died from either dehydration, exposure, or the effects of his limb being crushed. **But were such drastic measures really necessary?** Yes, we know he would have eventually died from his injuries, but what if he had just postponed his tough decision? Wouldn't someone have found him if he had just waited?

Utah rescue helicopter pilot, Terry Mercer, says if Ralston had not made the decision to cut off his own arm, he would never have survived. He told ABC news, "Where [Aron] was pinned, we went back in there and looked at the spot he was pinned and it was such a narrow canyon and the overlap was so bad that we could fly right directly over the top of it we would have never seen him down there."

"He reached a point when he knew he could die with an arm, or live [without one]," said Mike Hill, a spokesman for Canyonlands National Park, "To have the mental fortitude to do [what he did] is incredible." **Aron Ralston, like few others, could quite literally explain what Jesus meant when He made this graphic, gruesome statement:**

Matthew 5:30 (KJV) And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Matthew 5:30 (NLT) And if your hand—even if it is your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

No, Jesus wasn't talking about mountain climbing accidents; he wasn't even referring literally to the physical body. He was, however, speaking of a life-threatening injury that every person here has experienced – the wound of sin which traps us, alone in our personal wilderness. And without taking drastic measures, sin – in any form – will be fatal to you!

Sin Seduces Us

- Sin promises satisfaction and fulfillment
- But outward looks can be very deceiving – it's a trap!
- **Proverbs 5:3-6** The lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But the result is as bitter as poison, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. For she does not care about the path to life. She staggers down a crooked trail and doesn't even realize where it leads.

But Sin Doesn't Satisfy Us

- Sin can bring real pleasure – it can feel great to sin; that's why sin is so powerful and addictive
- There are godless comedians who are hysterical to hear, drugs that can make you feel like you own the world, and plenty of people who enjoy their immoral lifestyle of partying
- BUT THERE IS NO LASTING SATISFACTION IN SIN! We are left with an empty, unclean, ungratified, hollow, discontent feeling.
- That's why when sinners REALLY meet Jesus, they gladly abandon their sinful habits in a moment.
- **Hebrews 11:25** Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Sin Robs Us

- **SIN STEALS OUR JOY!**
- Don't underestimate the importance of joy!
- **Nehemiah 8:10** For the joy of the LORD is your strength.
- **Psalms 16:11** In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.
- **Proverbs 17:22** A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.
- **Proverbs 18:14** The human spirit can endure a sick body, but who can bear it if the spirit is crushed?
- **SIN STEALS OUR CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD!**
- Sin steals all purity and innocence, making us uneasy with people and uncomfortable with God.
- The devil doesn't flee from someone who is participating in sin – no matter how loud they pray! But the good news is that we CAN live in such a way that we have confidence before God.

- I'd rather be confident than cowering, living clean than standing condemned, choosing purity instead of pollution!
- **John 10:10** The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Then Sin Enslaves Us

- **Proverbs 5:22** The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.
- When you sin, you tie yourself up; instead of the sinner being free and the believer being "in bondage" it's really the reverse!
- BUT SIN WON'T LET YOU IN ON THIS SECRET!
- Satan loves to mock the human race. He loves to see men and women, the pinnacle of God's creation, putting needles in their arms, committing sodomy, shooting and stabbing each other, begging for money for another drink, dressing as transvestites, dying of sexually transmitted diseases, tossing and turning in their guilt, wallowing in their shame, drowning in their embarrassment. The devil loves to degrade and humiliate us!
- Every time you sin, it becomes harder for you to resist and easier to yield. THE TIME TO SAY "NO" IS NOW!
- **James 1:14-15** But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Finally Sin Destroys Us

- **Proverbs 6:27-28** Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?
- If you play with fire, you WILL be burned.
- If you play with sin, you WILL be destroyed.
- It's NEVER worth it in the end!
- **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- There is only one way in which sin is faithful – its reward is always death. Unfortunately, sin never shares this secret with you!
- Instead, sin promises riches, fame, pleasure, fulfillment and power. And while you may experience some of these along the way, they are only fleeting, lasting at best just a few decades.
- And then the real payday comes, and the results are always the same – DEATH, both natural and spiritual.

- ACTUALLY, SIN BRINGS DEATH RIGHT FROM THE START – It always kills something in us when we transgress. It assaults our sensitivity, trashes our conscience, mauls our willpower, and defiles our soul. You could almost say that every time we sin, something in us dies. Then, at the end of the road, sin pays up with eternal death.
- **Galatians 6:7** Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
- **IT TAKES DRASTIC MEASURES TO GET RID OF SIN!** You can't wean yourself away gradually, you can't wait for a better opportunity, you can't play around with it ... YOU HAVE TO AMPUTATE! NOW!
- **Matthew 5:30 (KJV)** And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
- You have to do something even more courageous than Aron Ralston; you have to DIE to your old nature. But there's a wonderful rescue waiting for every person who makes that tough decision!
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.