

At the Window

Proverbs 7 | Bryce Beale | May 21, 2017

Our hearts might imagine their Savior in any of several garments.

At one time faith casts its eyes toward Christ and sees him in regal splendor, enveloped in purple and scarlet robes, diadems gracing his brow.

Close your eyes and look again, and now he is garbed in priestly attire, blue robe overlaid with an ephod, turbaned head beset with a golden plaque that reads "Holy to the LORD." And there on his shoulders and on his chest are costly gems, inscribed with the names of his people, as he petitions to maintain our innocence before his Father.

But blink once more, and look again. Look to Christ in an outfit that to us is as royal as the most majestic robe a king ever donned, is as holy as Aaron's robes themselves.

There is no scepter in his hand, no sign of judgment in his eye toward his child; there is no crown upon his head to intimidate us away, and no sword in his grip.

What does he wear in this instance? A simple robe. What does he carry? A simple staff. That is all.

Yet at this sight the whole host of saints historic, joined by the chorus of Christians spread like a blanket across the globe today, are inspired by a death-defying hope and say, "We will follow you anywhere."

What kind of robe, what kind of staff, to ignite the heart of millions?

Well, look just behind him and you will have your answer. In his train walk a flock of sheep.

This is Jesus Christ, our shepherd.

Brothers and sisters, you who are the flock of God, you who are his little lambs and more precious in his sight than the emerald, sapphire, or diamond of his priestly breastplate upon which your names are indelibly inscribed, you are not, cannot be, scattered across the hills. You are not left to fall into every pit, to wander this disorienting world alone, any more than a shepherd on the Golan Heights would expect his flock to find green pastures without him.

We all like sheep would go astray, but he like a shepherd would not allow it.

The long-time saint with graying hairs can sing, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come." The good shepherd can lose not one and will be faithful to the end.

The fresh believer, not yet old enough for meat and already the object of every demon's malicious intent, lifts his voice to attest that "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing." But he is at our side with his rod and his staff, so even the naïve need not be shaken.

Little flock, I can prove for you that you have a Shepherd in heaven who has not forgotten you, but who cares for you his sheep. And I prove it by your presence here now.

For this morning, wolves have wandered out of the brush, and their hungry eyes have caught a glimpse of you. The devil and his legions refuse themselves rest until they have consumed you, until they have turned you out of the way and driven you into a mortal snare. Temptation is diffused like particles throughout the air. The wolves are watching, the wolves are waiting this morning for their moment.

But you know what restrains them now.

The Good Shepherd stands at your front, hand tightening around his staff, heart unwilling that any should perish. He would sooner lay down his life than surrender the most frail and fragile of his lambs. And as he assumes a stance for battle, his voice calls out instruction to you, his sheep. He urges you to stay behind him.

This morning, we are meditating on that voice, on those words. We will speak of sin and temptation, but do not think for a moment that I assume any of you can fight the wolves alone. The voice of Christ does not call us to defend ourselves, but rather to stay behind him as he fights our battle.

He is the shepherd.

Hear, then, the voice of your shepherd, that you may live.

PROVERBS 7

Solomon stands at the window, it is true; but we know that all Scripture is breathed out by God. Solomon was a servant only, like the staff in the shepherd's hand. The shepherd is the true speaker.

So we might imagine Christ, in his shepherd's robe and staff in hand, walking to the window before us, and having us look through the lattice with him, warning us of the wolves, urging us to stay behind him.

So then, let us stay behind him. Let us listen to his warning, as he speaks to us of the danger of sin.

The wolves

As we do so, our attention is turned first to the wolf, to sin itself, and so, in this illustrative instance, to the unfaithful woman, who in a sense represents all temptation and sin. This morning then we will begin at the middle of our passage, where we find this woman, and work our way outward.

Sin and pleasure

The first warning we receive from the voice of Christ is against sin's wolfish promise of pleasure.

The woman, in verse 10, is "dressed as a prostitute"—perhaps veiled like Tamar, to protect herself from the eyes of others who might betray her plot to her husband.¹ Maybe too her eyes were beautified with cosmetics, and with a cauterized conscience only the expectations of her culture constrained her to modesty.

Christ would not have you unaware of the enemy's schemes—Jesus directs your eyes through the window, and warns: sin will often dress herself up pleasantly, like the devil who disguises himself as an angel of light. Sin many times will come wrapped in beauty.

But she promises you more pleasure than merely the sight of her—see verse 16: "I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen." Pleasure is promised for your sight and for your touch; sin offers the comfort of a couch, the pleasant feel of coverings.

The wolf begins to see an interest in the little lamb's eyes, and so he continues to sing to her. Verse 17, "I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon," the fragrance of lovers to please your nose.

The grass beneath the wolves' feet subtly shifts to a hue of brighter green; the grass beneath your own feet begins to appear much browner than it did at first. Temptation has reached her silky hand into your chest and ever so lightly run her fingers across the skin of your affections.

What began as an interest grows into an urge. The beauty of sin's face, her sensual promises, at first seemed pleasant; but now they feel necessary. And as the green of that grass intensifies in its lush brightness, you find the hues of everything around you to dampen. The

¹ Gen. 38:15.

sky grows darker, the other sheep a dull cream—the shepherd himself is almost in grayscale now.

And the siren's voice wafts up playfully from the water, in verse 18: "Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love."

Is this you? This morning, have you wandered from the shepherd and walked your way in a hypnotic state toward sin's promises of pleasure? Wake up! Wake up!

Hear what follows—no more the luring song, but a crack as your Savior's staff falls upon the skull of the dog. May God bless his voice to such an effect this morning.

Sin and acceptance

But even if one wolf lies dead, there are others yet prowling, yet watching. If pleasure has proven an unsuccessful bait, the devil will pull up his line and place another worm upon his hook.

See verse 10 again, "And behold, the woman meets him." Notice, the man does not meet her, but she him. Verse 13, "She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face" she begins to speak. Skip to verse 15: "so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you."

We know from the observations of Solomon that these words are only half true at best. In verses 11 and 12 we read that "her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait." Yet she would have the youth believe she has eyes only for him.

For if sin's promise of pleasure is to no avail, she will try another means: she will promise you acceptance.

Often I have sat in a coffee shop and watched, around three o'clock, as middle schoolers have shuffled in. They are, like the woman in this text, loud. And the dynamic at play among them gives me honest sympathy and grief.

Young boys do very immature things, say nonsensical and off color things; but watching them through Solomon's window, so to speak, you realize why they act this way. They want to be accepted. They are vying for attention, longing to be liked. How many have begun a long and miserable trek through substance abuse, not because of the pleasure promised them by the drug or the drink, but because of the acceptance promised them by their peers?

Then I turn my eyes to the young girls, and I am grieved much more deeply. They give themselves to the foolish boys, body and soul. Again, watching through the window one realizes that they are seeking in these boys what they have probably never found in their own fathers: acceptance.

Sin will promise you the same. "Others do not like you?" she asks with pity in her voice. "How could they not? I have looked all over for you, I want you, I love you." She speaks like the gang of Proverbs chapter one: "Come, let us..."

"If you were of the world," Jesus told his disciples, "the world would love you as its own."² If you were of the world, if you would surrender yourself to this woman, to this sin, to whatever temptation wriggles upon the hook, the world would take you in its arms and celebrate you.

The popularity of the pop artist Miley Cyrus grew as she herself sunk down into sin; when she made a music video in 2013 so illicit that she herself regrets it, the next year it won the VMA Video of the Year Award.

The kingdoms of the world and their glory have been delivered over to the devil, and he gives them to whom he will.³ Love the world, and the world will love you.

A little lamb is looking at the wolf, gazing into those warm eyes which promise love, affection, and acceptance.

Is this you? Is your mind being reshaped by your peers; is sin looking less ugly to you, and holiness less appealing, because of your environment, your companions? Are you ready to follow your friends off the path toward apostasy?

Crack! Down falls another wolf, just before its jaw can close around its victim. So may it be!

Sin and logic

But now the remaining wolves are desperate. If the promise of pleasure and the promise of acceptance will not draw you from the flock, then temptation will drive her argument harder.

Your shepherd steps aside for you to look out the window, and he explains that sin not only makes grand promises, but backs her promises with logic.

² John 15:19.

³ Luke 4:6.

See how she begins her appeal in verse 14: “I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows.” We do not know the exact nature of these sacrifices, but see why she says this. Look at what immediately follows in verse 15: “so” or “therefore.”

Temptation is not dull witted—she is smarter than you. When you sin, you prove it. When you sin, her logic wins. She is careful in her reasonings.

She sees a sheep begin to retreat behind its shepherd, and so she calls out, “Oh, what’s the problem? You think you will displease your Savior by spending some time with me? You surely will not! I too worship God; I have offered sacrifices and paid my vows just today. This thing that you call sin, are you sure you should use so strong a word? You are attracted to people of the same sex as yourself—didn’t God make you how you are? And doesn’t God himself approve of love? Or, you watch pornography—but didn’t God himself make you a sexual being, and would he deprive you of that good? He says to wait until marriage, but he hasn’t provided you with a spouse, has he? Then is it really your fault?”

Ah, here is, as verse 5 says, an “adulteress with her smooth words.” See verse 21: “With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.”

If you have the wits about you to recognize the cost of sin, the ruin of your reputation, the destruction of relationships, she will see this in your eyes before half a minute is gone.

And she will offer you the words of verses 19 and 20: “For”—again, she reasons—“my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home.” The serpent hisses through the corridors of time: “You will not surely die!”⁴

She responds to your hesitation: “No one will ever know. If you click on that link, alone in your room, who will ever find out? Delete your browser history, and it is as if nothing has happened. Or that relationship with another woman you are developing at work, I can arrange a private meeting. Take your fill of love till morning, and then we will bury the event too deep beneath the ground to ever be unearthed again.”

Sin has a thousand arguments; if you engage her in debate, she will always come out the victor. Sin is not fought by contemplation, but by violence.

⁴ Gen. 3:4.

Crack! Stay behind your shepherd.

The sheep

How much we learn at the window! Now your shepherd has shown you in the streets below something of the nature of that sin which seeks your throat. We have, in the middle of this chapter, been told of the temptress.

But now we move out from that center, and our guide continues his lesson. We need to know not only the craft of our foe, but also our own weaknesses. The devil knows them; do you?

Look again through the window.

Near to temptation

Verses 6 through 8 describe the young man tempted by sin.

For at the window of my house
I have looked out through my lattice,
and I have seen among the simple
I have perceived among the youths,
a young man lacking sense,
passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.

Why must the shepherd warn us of this circumstance? Because he knows our frame, that we are but dust, and that if we should place ourselves under the rainclouds of temptation, we will become muddied.

Why is this youth near her house? We do not if he is even aware of the way he walks. He may be merely wandering about, a sheep who has strayed from the fold. But worse, he walks in the darkness. Why is he wandering about at this time of night? If he works during the day, shouldn't he be sleeping now?

Christ wishes us to know with certainty what experience itself will teach the casual observer: put yourself too near the fire of temptation, and you will be burned.

You are not strong enough to toe the line for long. And sin is not a mere line on the ground that you can toe—sin is active, even vehement. The young man wanders pointlessly about, but the woman knows exactly what she wants, and she works for it.⁵ Does not nature itself teach you

⁵ “...if *he* is aimless, his temptress is not.” Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (XX), 71.

the same: gravity makes falling the default, but to stand or to walk requires effort.

Therefore, as one commentator puts it, “Half our virtue we owe to being out of the way of temptation.”⁶

If you are a little lamb, the shepherd’s staff will spare you from wolves; but if you are prone to wander, his rod will discipline you. Children must be taught not to wander into the street near cars; Christians must be taught not to wander into the street near the temptress’ house.

If your unbelieving friends cause you to stumble into sin, cut them off and cast them from you. You might wish I would dampen that statement by some soft condition—but I will not. Better to break your laptop in half this afternoon than to keep it and to keep sinning.

Whatever lessens your appetite for Christ, away with it. Do not reason with it. In some matters, as one preacher has said, you must accept the fact that they can, you can’t. If other believers can enjoy an activity without damage to their conscience, but you cannot, then do not. If you know where your wall is weakest, you must fortify it before the enemy discovers the weakness and exploits it.

The danger of temptation

Oh flock of God, make war on indwelling sin and take heaven by violence. I cannot weaken my statements before, because the cost of sin is too great. We expand now to the outside of our text, to its beginning and end.

See verses 22 and 23:

All at once he follows her,
as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast
till an arrow pierces its liver;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
he does not know that it will cost him his life.

The Old and the New Testaments speak with one voice on this matter. Ezekiel writes the unchangeable edict, “The soul who sins shall die.”⁷ And Paul agrees with his statement, “The wages of sin is death.”⁸

No sheep can be plucked from the grip of Christ—he is too great a shepherd to lose a single lamb.

⁶ Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, (XX), XX.

⁷ Ezek. 18:20.

⁸ Rom. 6:23.

But still we find written to the sons in this passage, in its early verses, an appeal to cling close to wisdom, and in its final ones a reminder that sin leads to death.

How can this be? Will the shepherd fail the straying sheep? Why then is there any danger?

Because the one who does not care that he wanders shows himself to lack the mark of Christ upon his heart.

Many sheep wander on the mountains, give themselves to the wolves on every high place and under every green tree, but, when asked, will say they follow Jesus. Look through the window of wisdom, and you will see what is obvious from observation: that sheep is no follower of the shepherd.

It is quite different for a little lamb to wander, the one from the ninety-nine, and then thereafter to be pursued a way by the Savior and brought back, than to be a lamb of an entirely different flock.

Sin kills all without exception, because the soul who sins, who continues unrepentant and uncaring in sin, is not child of God, no sheep of Christ.

To you who are companions with sin and cannot see behind her beauty and her veil, who cannot see that her house is the way to Sheol, to you I make this closing appeal: Awake! Awake!

Run to the Good Shepherd—wolves and death lurk everywhere. Your sins will pull you like a millstone to the bottom of the ocean.

But run to the shepherd! He has a staff of wood, made of his cross, that can crush the serpent and smash the wolf's head. Here the grass is green, here the waters are still, here his rod and his staff will comfort you.

There is no place on earth that can protect you, no refuge for your safety now and into eternity, but in that tiny plot of land behind the shepherd. There, though all the world else might stink of death and slip toward dissolution, there not a wolf's tooth can so much as graze you. There in the shepherd's care you will never be lost.

There you will find pleasures forevermore, there you will have the acceptance of God.

Friends, the shepherd stands at the window this morning. I beg you, you who have ears to hear, listen and live.