

Seek It Like Silver

Proverbs 2:1-8 | Bryce Beale | Feb. 26, 2017

The time for allusions is drawing to its close.

Too long has deceit clasped its cuffs around the wrists of fact; too long has the pollution of falsehood choked our skies.

Tell me my heart is not the only one that craves the triumph of truth in our world!

My neighbors are asleep—almost everyone of them asleep—to the sun of righteousness that is dawning. They follow an American Dream, but do not recognize that you cannot dream unless you are sleeping. I want to take my stand like Elijah upon dusty Mt. Carmel and cry, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If Jesus is God, then follow him; but if not, then don’t.”

It is the gray world of thought between these opinions that is unbearable.

When Israel fashioned her golden calf at the base of Sinai, Moses called for the few still faithful to stand aside, and the descendants of Levi gathered around him. When Elijah complained that he alone remained faithful to Yahweh in his day, that all others had succumbed to error, the Lord replied that he had kept 7000 for himself who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

And so at this present time there is a remnant. The serpent’s lie in Eden, his slander of the character of God, could not be contained by wall or cherubim, but has infected the world. Almost all lie under the sway of the father of lies.

Almost all. There is a remnant.

Friends, let us be the remnant! When the Son of Man comes and dispels the darkness, let him find faith on the earth here. No more of this indecision about Christ; dull blades don’t cut, and lukewarm water has no use.

Right now an entrepreneur is putting all of his savings down as capital, and backing that risk by sixty-hour work weeks. No one is stopping him; they see his determination and admire it.

An Olympian athlete is giving every day of the week less one to practice, is coming home sweaty and exhausted every evening. He is applauded for his drive.

Where is the remnant who, seeing through the misty transience of this world and all its false promises, will have Jesus and nothing less than Jesus. Where are the few who look forward with clear eyes, and drive their chariot madly toward the goal?

This requires a determined certainty about the truth that is in Christ Jesus, an intentional neglect of every voice to the contrary, and the choice to press forward.

I'm handing you a sword today and asking if you will join me in this fight. Falsehood will besiege you whether you put up a defense or not—I see it happening to many, in their marriages and families and personal lives. But the dawn has come, the last star is disappearing from the morning sky, and it is time that we drive forward through the enemy's line. We ought to be progressing in our pursuit of Christ, not sinking back into uncertainty and lethargy.

My task this morning is to take up the words of Proverbs 2, and convey to you through these words God's desire that you push forward toward Christ, past the allusions of this world, nearer to his blessed presence. I must, in the words of the text itself, convince you to pursue this as if it were silver or hidden treasure—with fervor, not apathetically.

To that end, I want to turn your eyes to Scripture now, that God may make his appeal through me.

PROVERBS 2:1-8

You may wonder where Christ is to be found in this passage, since his name was so prominent in my introduction, but noticeably missing in these verses.

Jesus is wisdom

Let me establish from this text what has been said before, and what will prove very helpful as we continue our study of Proverbs.

More than once I have been told, by someone studying Proverbs in their quiet time, that it is hard to warm the heart at this fire. I do not think the fault is in the fire, but in how we approach it. I hope God will use this discussion to help us draw near the fire and enjoy the Proverbs. How do we see Jesus in the Proverbs?

As with any study in the Scriptures, we have to start with the original setting of what we are studying. So we ask, who is writing Proverbs 2? God inspired the Scriptures through men, so we must consider the men through whom he inspired them.

See the very first verse of our book, 1:1: “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.” Solomon, the great and wise king of Israel, penned the plea we are reading, and he wrote it to his son.

Solomon is the human author.

But notice something fascinating about the inspiration of the Scriptures, which sets them apart from every other written work.

Look at verse 1: “My son, if you receive *my words*...” Whose words are we to receive? Solomon’s, certainly. “...and treasure up *my commandments* with you.” Whose commandments must we treasure up? Solomon’s.

But now turn your eyes to the second verse. Solomon writes with a Hebrew’s preference for repetition, and repeats what he has just said with some variation. But in effect he is saying the same thing. And he writes, “making your ear attentive to *wisdom*.”

Solomon’s words and commandments, in his mind, are simply *wisdom*. Of course we all think this is true of ourselves; we all think our words are the same as wisdom.

But this is different. Again he says, “and inclining your heart to *understanding*.” His words are understanding.

Now, there is a long condition, an “If,” in this passage, followed by a result or “then.” The “If” runs from verse 1 to 4, and the “then” happens in verse 5.

So follow this: Solomon is saying that if his son were to receive his, Solomon’s, words, which are the same as wisdom and understanding, “then,” in verse 5, “you will understand.”

Why? “For,” verse 6 explains, “the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

Solomon is saying that wisdom comes from the mouth of God. But he is also saying that wisdom, the very same wisdom, comes from his own mouth.

What do we conclude? That God is speaking to Solomon’s son through Solomon. There is, in other words, an author behind and above the human author. What Solomon says here, God says.

We are part way to our destination.

Consider further *who* God is speaking to. “Well,” you say, “Solomon’s son, of course.”

Yes, but notice something in the next chapter. See in 3:11-12: “My son”—there is that same address as in our present passage—“do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

With that in your mind, turn to Hebrews 12. The author of this chapter is encouraging Christians not to lose heart in suffering. And he writes, “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?”

“Forgotten the exhortation? What is the exhortation that these Christians had forgotten, which was supposed to help them suffer well?”

The author continues with a quotation: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Where have we heard this exhortation before? In Proverbs! And this New Testament book is saying that the exhortation given by Solomon to his son is truly an exhortation given by God to his sons.

When we read in Proverbs, “My son,” we as the people of God should hear the heavenly author behind Solomon, who is our heavenly father, speaking to *us*.

This mystery is great, but in Proverbs, as in all of Scripture, *God* speaks, *through* human authors, *to us*.

Will you continue with me on this logical path a short way further? We are almost at trail’s end.

In these early chapters of Proverbs, we will find Lady Wisdom—wisdom personified, treated as if it were a woman. But that is only a picture. Wisdom is something much deeper than a woman crying in the streets.

Look to Proverbs 8:27, where wisdom speaks. “When he,” that is God, “established the heavens, I was there.” Now look to verse 30: “I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.”

This will require some strong mental work, but I want you to see the substance behind this picture.

Wisdom, we were told in chapter 2, comes from the mouth of God. So wisdom is, we would say, a word that God speaks. And if you look at the “then” part of our passage, in verse 5, you may be surprised to find that what you get when you seek wisdom is not merely something to put in

your head, but “the fear of the LORD” and “the knowledge of God.”¹ This skill at life is relational—you do not know this wisdom truly until you know God personally. So then, what God is speaking, his words, include a revelation of himself to us, a revelation of his deeds and thoughts and nature, so that we may have a relationship with him. Wisdom is a word that lets us know God.

Now, in Proverbs 8 we see that wisdom was also present with God, as though through wisdom, his word, he were creating the universe. And this we find to be true, because how does God make the world in Genesis 1? Through what, or in what way? By speaking *words*.

So through wisdom, the word coming from the mouth of God, the world was made.

Hear now the beginning of John’s gospel.

“In the beginning,” the same words with which Genesis opens, “was the Word, and the Word was with God,” which we know from Proverbs. His word, his wisdom, was there with him. But see what follows: “and the Word was God.” Wisdom is not separate from God, as though it were merely something he possessed and might lose. It is essential to his very being. God is wise—wisdom is the way God thinks. And God’s words, his wisdom, being a revelation of himself, are in a sense then himself.

John continues. “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”² We saw this too, that all things were made through wisdom, the word of God.

Ah, but here is the unsuspected fact, the glorious revelation, in verse 14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Here is trail’s end: Jesus is *personal* wisdom. The picture of a word coming from the mouth of God, by which all things are made, which explains God to us, and which is wisdom—that picture points us to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus came from the Father to reveal the Father to us, and to bring us into a relationship with him. Jesus is the Word of God incarnate; Jesus is wisdom.

¹ This genitive phrase could mean “the knowledge that God possesses” or “the knowledge that comes from God” (the latter being particularly suggested by the context in verse 6). But parallel with “the fear of the LORD,” the interpretation that perhaps suggests itself the most strongly is “a personal knowing of God.”

² Vv. 2-3.

Pursuing Jesus

Returning now to Proverbs 2, how do we approach this fire to feel its warmth? By knowing that if you are in Christ Jesus, then these are not the dead words of an old king to his son, but the words of your God to you about your Savior.

Hear again these words in this light.

Your heavenly Father says to you, “My son” or “My daughter, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding...” Pause there—God is appealing to you, that you listen to all he says and commands. But remember, there is more. His wisdom is Christ your Savior. We go to Jesus for wisdom, for he is wisdom, and that is what God is calling us to do.

Ah, but it is no passive reception of Christ he enjoins. “[Y]es, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures...”

God is calling you to pursue Christ hard.

Are there any here whose heart burns within them as God speaks?

The way is wide that leads away from Jesus, and many find it. The devil coats his every lie with sugar, and lessens every prick like a mosquito, which numbs where it bites. Hell is full of Christians, who were so in name only and not in fact. You can lead a decent life, and lose it. You need only be passive.

Those who attain Christ, this wisdom from God, are only those who pursue it as if it were silver. Wisdom cries aloud in the streets, as we saw in chapter 1—Christ calls all men everywhere to repent. He has given his blood and hung upon the cross. He has prepared his home and table; whoever wants to come can come.

But do you want to come? Christ calls out for you; will you call out for him?

Come in your naivety and simplicity; come in your folly and inexperience. But by all means, *come*. That is the one requirement, that you would really want Christ, and so come after him.

About three hundred years after the death and resurrection of our Lord, in modern day Turkey, forty men stood, stripped of their garments, on a frozen pond. They were all Roman soldiers of the same legion who had professed faith in Jesus Christ, and so Rome had condemned them to stand exposed here on this cold night, to freeze to death.

As they shivered their lives away, they could possibly see the warm baths that had been prepared for any of them who would renounce their faith in Jesus. Forsake Jesus, and the baths were theirs. One of the soldiers chose this and left his companions.

But the other thirty-nine remained.

Then something surprising occurred. One of the guards set to watch over the freezing men stripped off his garments and joined them, to die at their side as a follower of Christ.³

What keeps you on a frozen pond when a hot bath is offered? Even more, what makes you join those dying there?

Only this: you must value Jesus more than physical comfort, and more than life itself. And if you value him more than life itself, you must value him more than all the pleasures this life can offer, since you lose those at death.

In other words, those forty men valued Jesus Christ more than silver; they sought him as if he were hidden treasure.

They fulfilled the parable of Jesus from Matthew 13:44: “The kingdom of heaven,” he said, “is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” They sold all because they had found silver, and they counted it worth more than all else that they had.

They sought him like silver, and found him.

How one seeks

But what of us, who are unlikely to die on a frozen pond for Christ?

If by these words of God your heart is enflamed to surrender all to Christ and seek him with all your heart, how can you do so?

I recall a conversation I had at a coffee shop a few years ago, with a truck driver whom I had been connecting with over several weeks. And I remember when I talked with him about the Bible, he made a comment like, “I just want to know more of the Bible. I feel like anytime someone talks to me about this stuff, we get stuck at the ‘Jesus hump,’ which we never get over. They just want to talk about Jesus—but isn’t there a lot more interesting stuff in the Bible than just that?”

³ “Forty Martyrs of Sebaste,” Wikipedia.com, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty_Martyrs_of_Sebaste (accessed Feb. 26, 2017; last modified Dec. 8, 2016).

I understand the question, but he misunderstood Jesus. His idea of the “Jesus hump” is what’s found in some churches, where a few facts about the life and death of Jesus are recounted as if that is all there is. The glories of Christ are reduced to a few assertions. That Jesus is boring, I agree with my truck-driving friend.

But, God be praised, that is not our Jesus.

When we say that Jesus is personal wisdom, we mean, as Paul wrote, that in him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”⁴

Until you have unearthed all wisdom and mined all the knowledge there is, you have not exhausted your study of Jesus Christ. All of it is contained within Jesus.

But how do we study this Jesus, who is God? God reveals himself to us through Jesus, his word. But in what way does he reveal Jesus to us so that we may know him? By the written word of God. We say that Jesus is the Word of God, and this is true; in him all wisdom is contained. But he reveals this wisdom to us through Scripture, which bears witness to him. We know the Word through the word—so we seek Jesus, our wisdom, in the wise words of the Bible.

Now remember our text. What it says of Jesus, the wisdom of God, it says also of all the wisdom within Jesus which is revealed in Scripture. See how the condition builds in the first four verses. You must receive Scripture, treasure it up, incline your ear and heart to it. But more, you must raise your voice and cry out to God for understanding of his word. But more, you must search the Scriptures with a Berean spirit, as if silver were hidden in its pages.

For there is silver there of the finest kind, a pearl of the greatest value: Jesus Christ himself!

And he is available to the diligent student, to the Christian who will come humbly and with the will to work.

You may shrink back from a serious, intense study of Scripture, because you feel inadequate to the task. How will you find Jesus in Proverbs if you do not know the original languages, or have access to the best commentaries, or have a powerful mind? Verse 6 reassures you: “the LORD gives wisdom.” He is happy to answer your efforts with joyful discovery. Prayer will accomplish more than we imagine in our studies. If you come to Scripture with a desire to know Jesus more, and a humble dependence on God’s spirit evinced by prayer for help, you will find the silver.

⁴ Col. 2:3.

But remember, the one who comes to Scripture in this way, thinking to find treasure there, will prove what's in his heart by how diligently he studies. God gives wisdom to those who seek it like silver. There is the prod for us.

Find those who have long walked with God, and ask them how to study the Scriptures. Find a man with a dusty brow and hands made strong by long digging in the word of God, and learn his ways.

Conclusion

Friends, I end with this final appeal.

I cannot move you if you are unwilling to be moved. If the thorns of this world have choked the word so that it bears no fruit, and you are unwilling to put forward the work of cutting some thorns from your life that you may chase Christ in the Scriptures, then what can my words do?

If you will seek Christ in the Scriptures as though he were bronze or copper or some lesser metal, and refuse to seek more eagerly than that, he will never be yours. And what can I do to change that?

But if you want Christ, you can have him. He has died to reconcile you to himself—turn to him and he is yours! All the riches of wisdom and knowledge are compacted into one man, who reaches his hand to you.

And if you are already reconciled, the time has come to seek him more, not less. Every day he offers you more of himself, if you will open the book and read. If you will apply your mind to his word, in careful meditation, and offer up prayers for help, then you will have more of Christ.

It is that simple. But will you do it?

I say with grief that some of you will not. You will hear this, but will not care enough to cast off the burdens that have prevented you thus far. Or you will set your hand to the plow, but when the ground gets rough and dry, you will turn back.

But let me speak to those who will not, cannot, take no for an answer in this matter. Where is the Syrophenician woman who follows Jesus through the city and will not be refused? Where are the sons of Levi with the sword on their side, and where is Phinehas with the spear of zeal in his hand?

Where are the twelve who, when others were leaving their master, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we

have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”⁵

Where are the 7000 of Elijah’s day? Lies abound, but we will not bend our knee to the Baals.

Neither I nor God care what your mental capacity or personality is. If you seek Christ, you will find him, if you seek him with all your heart.

Open your Bible, cry out to God with a desperate plea, and seek silver there until you have found him.

⁵ John 6:68-69.