

SUMMER 4 - The Seduction of Young Men

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service of Holy Trinity on the 19th of January 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled The Seduction of Young Men and is based on Proverbs 7.1-8.21.

Who would like some Turkish delight? Oh, nice Turkish delight.

Nice and sweet. Not fattening at all. I won't tell your mum. I won't tell your dad. I won't tell your wife or your husband.

I won't tell your kids. Nice Turkish delight. Very nice. I've got a drawer full here. Come and have some. Come and have some. You won't regret it.

[1 : 03] It's lovely for you. A house full of Turkish delight. Pleasures for the night. Well, some people are suckers for Turkish delight.

Whisper the word and they drool with anticipation. And in the dark alleys of the city, they hunt out the Turkish delight vendors, captivated by just a whiff in the air of Turkish delight.

Their noses twitching at the aroma. Flattered them. Flattered if anyone should so much offer them a free sample. Doubly flattered.

Can you imagine? If it was royalty that offered it to you for free. Well, I don't like Turkish delight. I've been to Istanbul to try the real thing.

I still don't like Turkish delight. Yuck. And no amount of free offers of Turkish delight. No amount of flattery to try and get me to buy some or taste some will ever convince me, I suspect.

[2 : 15] Ferrero Rocher. Yeah, that's a bit different. I realised as though I was writing this sermon that on my desk was a box of Ferrero chocolates. Ferrero Rocher chocolates.

It's not full at the end of the sermon. We all have our weak points. And the allure, the power, the seduction of temptation is strong.

Feed our greed. Fill our thrill. Fill our confectionery or chocolate. Well, it's not so serious an example of temptation and seduction, really.

More serious. Sexual desire. The desire to be lazy. The desire to be rich. The attraction of other gods.

The temptation to gamble. The inclination to drink. Fascination with drugs. The urge to have power and be in control.

[3 : 18] We're all suckers for things like that. Some of them, at least. What's your vulnerability? What's your weakness? What's your Achilles heel?

What's your Turkish delight? How do we avoid the snares? What's your weakness? My child, keep my words and store up my commandments with you.

Store up the commandments of the wise teacher. The commandments in the end of God. To store them up like treasure that we guard and value highly. Keep my commandments and live.

Oh, not just a life full of ongoing drudgery, but life to the full, life abundantly. Keep my commandments and live. Life as it's meant to be.

In all its fullness. Keep my teachings as the apple of your eye. The thing that delights us above anything.

[4 : 26] Our delight. Our joy. Our highest desire. Bind them on your fingers. And write them on the tablet of your heart.

Not just referring to memory, though that's part of it probably. But internalising the commandments so that they take up their dwelling place, their home, within us.

So that they're not foreign to us. So that they belong within us. Within our heart. Within our mind. Within our will and our intention.

You see, not reluctant obedience. That won't give us strength against temptation. Nor will ignorance of God's commands.

That won't give us power to withstand the attractions of temptation. But rather the commandments, the words of God, taking root in our hearts, written and inscribed on our hearts.

[5 : 26] On the tablets of our hearts. That's where strength to resist and withstand the temptations of our world. Where that strength comes from. The wise teacher conveys this now in relational sorts of terms.

Say to wisdom, You are my sister. And call insight. And call insight your intimate friend. Maybe the word used here as sister might even be bride.

For so that word is sometimes used in the song of songs in the Old Testament. It implies that the way in which we are to be strong, the way in which God's commandments, the wise teachings are to take up root within us, is like embracing as a bride wisdom herself.

She's the one for us, if you remember back to the last couple of weeks in chapters 3 and 4. She's the one to go after. Wisdom, of course, is fear of the Lord.

The obedience of the commandments of the Lord. But more than that, being wise in the world which God had made. And the reason for embracing wisdom as our bride, if not our sister, that they may keep you from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

[6 : 52] Embracing the right woman protects you from the wrong woman. And our alliance with wisdom, Dame Wisdom, the woman whom we are to embrace, our alliance with her, gives us strength to withstand and to resist the loose woman, whose smooth words seek to attract us and tempt us.

Now behind all this lies the premise that we need protection. We're not strong enough on our own to withstand the smooth words of the loose woman, the adulteress, the temptations and allures of the world in which we live.

And we fool ourselves if we think that we're strong enough. We kid ourselves if we think that we can resist and we can stand firm. If you think you're standing firm, be careful lest you fall.

Paul's advice to the Corinthians still stands. Pride comes before a fall. The wise teacher of Proverbs words in chapter 16 still stands too.

So Lady Wisdom is the woman to be attached to, as we saw last week. Keep close to her and she will protect you. After all, how many men fall for seduction when their woman, their wife, is on their arm?

[8 : 13] Embrace Lady Wisdom. Love her. Let her be the delight of your eyes. For therein lies strength and protection from the loose women, the adulteresses and temptresses of our world.

You see, Lady Wisdom's a bit like our minder, our bodyguard, although better perhaps our soul guard, our spirit guard. Love her. Delight in her.

Love God's commandments. Delight in God's commandments. Love God. Delight in him. And let the wise words of God's commandments be written and etched on the tablets of your heart.

The wise teacher tells a story. From the window of my house, I looked out through the lattice, probably some sort of crisscross across the window.

No glass then. A way of keeping a bit of cool, a bit of air, a bit of privacy in the house. And through that lattice, looking down probably from upstairs, down on the streets of the town, he spies the people of the town.

[9 : 26] I saw among the simple ones, I observed among the youths, a young man without sense. Probably most of the youths had no sense, but this is a youth with particularly little sense.

A fool, naive, inexperienced in life. And he seems to separate himself from the other group of youths, for he was passing along the street near her corner.

We know who she is, nudge, nudge, wink, wink, taking the road to her house, surreptitiously slinking off, thinking that no one can see.

His youthful group of friends probably engaging themselves in some sort of conversation or mirth and he just sort of surreptitiously glides down a side alley near her house, thinking no one sees.

But there the wise teacher spies him from his lattice. And it's in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. Very little twilight in the Middle East.

[10 : 32] You go from light to dark very quickly. This is one who picks his time. It's soon dark. It's soon dark and he thinks that no one will see him. And so he slinks off in her neighbourhood, near her corner, down her street.

And it's clear who she is because she comes to meeting him in verse 10. Then a woman comes toward him, decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart. Somebody wearing, who knows, gaudy clothes, ultra mini skirts, showing a bit of leg, high heels, whatever.

She comes to meet him. She's on the prowl. She's loud. She's wayward. Her feet do not stay at home. She has no home, really. She's a street walker. A brazen street walker, on the prowl, on the game.

Always on the lookout lurking, looking for someone to snare. Now in the street, now in the squares, and at every corner, she lies in wait, looking for one like, a senseless youth.

And when she comes to him, there are no chat up lines. She seizes him, and kisses him.

[11:48] Bold, effusive, voluptuous, unashamed. No little suggestive lines, have you got the time, honey? She grabs him, and she kisses him.

Here is the wrong person, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in the wrong company. The wrong person, because he's young, he's ignorant, he's a fool. He's in the wrong place, although he knows it.

He's in her neighborhood, near her corner, in her street. The wrong time, it's darkness. And of course, she's the wrong company. A prostitute.

A princess of darkness. And now come the smooth words. And there's more than Turkish delight, on offer here. I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows.

That's an unlikely chat-up line. Is it some sort of religious camouflage, that she's trying to pretend to him, that she's a very pious, and a very upright woman?

[12:51] That she has made some vows, and as a result of the vow being fulfilled, she's offered the sacrifice, in accordance with Old Testament law, from the book of Leviticus. And now with the leftover food, from that sacrifice, according to the laws of Leviticus, she's going to have a feast, and she needs people to celebrate, because the meat must be eaten that night.

Is this some sort of religious charade, of piety, to try and dupe him, into thinking that she's honorable, and respectable, and upright? It's hard to know, because she's dressed like a prostitute. It's pretty obvious who she is. Then comes the flattery. Now these are really smooth words. Here is the woman of the town, clearly notorious, well known, and she says to this youth, So now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.

It's as though the woman of the town has come out with eyes only for him. Oh what flattery, to think that the woman of the town wants me. Her smooth words are so flattering, so convincing, so enticing.

I must be something if she wants me. They make him feel special of course. So easy to fall into her hands. Don't do it Edmund, she's a wicked witch.

[14:16] But he doesn't see beyond, her prostitute's flattery. Now there's no engagement here on a date, waiting for the meal to be over, before she says, would you like to come back for some coffee?

None of that at all. She goes straight to what's on offer. She doesn't beat around this bush, this woman. So she says to him in verses 16 and 17, I have decked my couch with coverings, coloured spreads of Egyptian linen.

I've perfumed my bed with myrrh, and aloes, and cinnamon. This is a luxurious, scented bed that she's offering him. Compare that to the typical, fairly hard bedrolls, that would be rolled out on the mud, or earthen floor.

And all these scents, symbols of love, used many of them in the Song of Songs about love. Here is a woman flattering, with a display of wealth and riches, enticing him to come back to her bed.

She seems to have forgotten all about the meal. Let's get to bed straight away. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning.

[15:22] Let us delight ourselves with love. Does he really need it spelled out? Is he that wet behind the ears? And all nights stand, till morning. How could he resist?

And what deceit there is. She offers him love. She means just sex. And what's more, her husband's away. There's no fear.

For my husband is not at home. He's gone on a long journey. He took a bag of money. I know how much money he took. He's going to do business. We're wealthy. And he'll be away for some time. He'll not come home until full moon.

Presumably at least a couple of weeks away. You see, it's okay. You're not going to be caught. You can get away with it. This will be fun. It'll be a thrill. Well, here's an offer you can't refuse.

It appeals to the senses. He sees her in all her array. He hears her smooth words. He touches her. He tastes her lips. He smells the exotic spices and scents of her bed.

[16:22] An offer you can't refuse. Well, here's to you, Mrs. Robinson. Let's go. Her seduction weaves its spell and he's spelled out. Her web has caught a fly.

With much seductive speech, she persuades him. With her smooth talk, she compels him. And right away he follows her. That is, the words might take a bit of time to weave their spell, but as soon as they've won their spell, he's eager to get going.

Come on, let's go. Quickly, right away. He follows her back to her house, back to her room, back to her bed. But his folly is portrayed graphically.

A sacrificial animal. A stupid beast he is, really, little more. Trapped and ensnared by her spell and her web.

And he's oblivious to the danger. He thinks he's not going to get caught. There's no fear of God in his heart. He thinks he's safe. Offer a bit of harmless thrill. But sex kills.

[17:25] To paraphrase a slogan in our society today. Be careful. Sex kills. So verse 22 goes on to say that he's like an ox to the slaughter.

Or he bounds like a stag toward the trap until an arrow pierces its entrails. He's like a bird rushing into a snare. Not knowing that it will cost him his life.

Sex kills. The wages of sin is death. End of story. And the moral of the story?

Now, my sons, listen to me and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Listen not to smooth, seductive words.

But listen to my wise words. Listen to what I'm teaching you, the wise teacher says. Listen to the commandments, the teachings that he's referred to back in verses 1 and 2.

[18:32] Listen to them. Don't incline your ear to the smooth, seductive words. But listen to what is true and what is wise. Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways.

Do not stray into her paths. That is, don't go into dangerous territory. Don't cross the line out of safety. Keep away from her paths.

Not just don't go down them, but keep away from them. If you want to avoid the devil, don't go into his neighborhood. So don't even go near her paths. Keep well away from them.

Don't be found in the wrong place, is what he's saying. Too many Christians flirt with temptation. We're told not to go beyond this fence, that that is sin.

And instead of keeping away from the fence, as far away as we can to be safe, we spend our life perched over the fence, seeing how far we can lean. But it's not very stable and safe doing that.

[19:33] And yet so often Christians are leaning as far as they can into the dangerous territory thinking they're safe. Keep well away, is the advice, the command of this wise teacher.

Avoid temptation. Shun it. Flee from it. Don't flirt with it. And then the warning that this is not the only victim of this woman.

For many are those that she has laid low, and numerous are her victims. Her house is the way to Sheol, the name for the place of the dead, going down to the chambers of death.

Maybe King Solomon, the wise teacher of this first part of this book, is thinking back on his own father, David, King David, who also looked out from the roof of his house, not wisely like Solomon here, but lustfully, which led to the adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband, and the death of the baby.

For all her attraction, for all the attraction of the smooth words and seductive speech, for all the attraction of the loose woman, the adulteress, the end is clear.

[21:00] Beyond orgasmic ecstasy is painful death. Beyond the exotic smells of spices is the stench of a rotting corpse.

Temptation always offers more than it delivers, and whatever it delivers, has the unpromised bitterness as an aftertaste.

Now this is more than just wrong sex. This is not about just going after a prostitute on the street. The book of Proverbs is about resisting folly and evil.

The loose woman is leading people astray, leading fools astray down evil paths. Oh yes, that might be the path of illicit promiscuity, but it's also the path of power, the path of greed, of money, the path of laziness, the path of pleasure.

It's the path of ignorance, the path of fearlessness before God. It is the path of idolatry. It is the path of evil.

[22 : 08] It is the path of wickedness. And human beings are weak. We are weak and vulnerable creatures. We love darkness. The sights, the smells, the tastes, the sounds of this world appeal.

They ring. They scratch our itching ears. We love darkness more than light. So treasure the words of God's wisdom.

Don't be a fool and think yourself strong. Don't fall for the flattery and the smooth words, but love wisdom. Love God's word. Let it be the apple of your eye.

Let it be your joy and your delight. Embrace it like a bride. Meditate on that word day and night.

Keep those commandments etched in the tablets of your heart.

And within Christian fellowship, apply them at the points of your vulnerability. Now the wisdom that God offers us through the book of Proverbs still stands.

[23 : 11] It's still vital. It's still there for life. But how much more we understand wisdom today, nearly 3,000 years after King Solomon's wise words.

For wisdom personified for him was Dame Wisdom or Lady Wisdom, the lady to embrace in the opening words of this chapter. And we'll see more of her next week. But wisdom personified has lived on this earth.

Jesus Christ, our wisdom, Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And he is the one to embrace. He is the one to love, to follow. His words are the ones to treasure up in our heart.

And by trusting him and identifying in his death and resurrection, then his wise words are written on the tablets of our heart.

embrace Jesus, our eternal bride. spirit of God. ninth forgiveness... and behold her birth. Does that lead me to the birth through our heart?

[24 : 21] The end of the ■■■■■ of the Lord, which has been here for you about