

Spotting the Lion on Safari: Being Vigilant and Recognizing the Threat to Us

When you are travelling through lion country, you must be vigilant. In June 2015, a young woman paid for her lack of vigilance with her life. She was visiting a safari park in South Africa. Reports suggest that she was taking photographs—with the window of her vehicle open. Tourists in nearby vehicles honked their horns to warn her, but she was engrossed in photography. A lion crept up alongside the vehicle, and seeing an opportunity, grabbed the woman and dragged her through the open window. Sadly, nothing could be done to save her—she was mauled to death. This story illustrates the fact that to a lion you are potential prey.

To the devil, you are potential prey. The devil is on the prowl—yes, even at this convention. The devil is hunting us. He is actively seeking an opportunity to devour us. The devil wants to rob us of everything we have in Christ—he desires to take away our peace, joy, assurance, and usefulness in the kingdom of heaven. He wants to cause us to make shipwreck of the faith. And he wants to do that by tempting us to sin.

This world is the devil’s territory. Peter says that he “walketh about.” We cannot avoid walking through the devil’s territory, because we cannot avoid living in the world, but we be vigilant as we walk through it. We do not want to be caught taking a photo—or, God forbid, a selfie, with the lion!

Peter urges us to be sober, be vigilant. My subject is vigilance. The word translated “vigilant” means “Be wakeful!” or “Be watchful!” The opposite of vigilance is sleepiness, drowsiness or carelessness. Pay attention; be alert; keep your wits about you; do not let your guard down! If you fall asleep, the lion will find you easy prey. If you become distracted, the lion will creep up behind you and devour you when you least expect it; if you wander off by yourself, the lion will welcome you as an easy meal. Similarly, if you are not vigilant, the devil will maul you, and, but for God’s grace, the devil will destroy you.

The main reason for fatalities in wildlife parks is the tourists’ lack of vigilance. Many tourists underestimate the power of the lion—the lion does not *look* dangerous. It looks like a big cat. The lion only looks dangerous when it bares its teeth and reveals its claws, but by then it is too late. Once the lion has roared, it has its prey in its power. Amos 3:4 asks, “Will

a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he hath taken nothing?" If you hear the lion roaring beside you, it may well be the last thing you will ever hear! If you hear the devil roar, you are already defeated.

What can we learn about the devil as we observe the lion?

First, both are stealth predators. The lion does not have the speed or the stamina to chase prey at speed. What the lion lacks in speed, it makes up for in stealth and cunning. This is true of the devil. He works best when you do not notice him. Satan rarely roars, because that would give away his position. Instead, he is the master of deceit.

Second, the lion is an opportunistic predator. Most predators are opportunists, for it takes time and energy to hunt. That is why many predators look for an easy meal—for stragglers or weak specimens. If a lion is hunting a herd of wildebeest, he does not pick a fight with the largest adult male with the strongest horns. He will look for the weaker specimen. Why, reasons Satan, risk fighting the fully armed Christian, when a drowsy, poorly armed Christian presents himself instead?

Since the devil is an opportunist, we must not give him an opportunity.

The first enemy of vigilance is presumption. The devil attacks a presumptuous soul, because presumptuous souls do not watch.

Perhaps the two best examples of presumptuous souls, whom the devil grievously mauled, were Samson and Peter. Samson presumed that if he kept living in sin, God would do nothing about it. Samson in his presumption was not vigilant, and the devil's roar can be heard in Delilah's triumphant cry, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!" (Judges 16:20). Peter presumed that, even if the other disciples denied Jesus, he never would. The devil's roar can be heard in the servant girl's triumphant accusation, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee" (Matt. 26:73). Neither Samson nor Peter watched and prayed, for they did not feel the need.

The second enemy of vigilance is to be foolish enough to give the devil an opportunity. "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). When you are foolish enough to open your car door in a safari park, do not be surprised when the lion drags you through the open window. When you are foolish enough to open your soul to the devil, do not be surprised when he takes advantage of you. All of us have a besetting sin. For some, it is pride: the devil is looking for an opportunity to exploit your pride. For some, it is lust: the devil is looking for

an opportunity to inflame your lust. For some, it is anger: the devil is looking for an opportunity to turn your anger into violence. Those sins are slow and progressive. Slowly they take over your soul and your life. Little by little, slowly and surely, the devil creeps up on you, and, when he has you in his sights, he roars, and pounces on you as a cat on a helpless mouse.

There are several ways in which we give place to the devil.

Prayerlessness gives place to the devil.

Young people, do you pray? Are you learning to pray? Prayer is the source of our strength. At the convention, are you praying? Do you spend all day in the exciting activities of the convention, and then collapse exhausted into bed at the end of the day without prayer? Make it your practice to spend quality time in prayer. It is no accident that often the call to watch is accompanied in scripture by the call to pray.

Second, a neglect of the means of grace, which means a neglect of public worship, catechism, and private Bible study, gives place to the devil.

Scripture is your spiritual food. If you encounter the lion without proper nourishment, you will not fare well. Scripture is your sword. If you encounter the lion without that weapon, the lion will tear your defenseless soul into pieces. The devil will do everything he can to trick you into laying down your sword so that he can devour you. Jesus caused the devil to flee by applying scripture. But if you come with your own wisdom, you are facing a lion with a toothpick or a spoon. How will you put the devil to flight with the scriptures, unless you know the scriptures? And how will you know the scriptures—the right verse, the right truth, and the right application for each temptation—unless you attend diligently to Bible reading, catechism, and the sermons?

Third, a neglect of the communion of saints gives place to the devil.

When traveling through lion country, there is safety in numbers. The lone gazelle is easy prey for the lion. When you wander away from the other saints, you expose yourself to the attacks of the devil. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 4:12–13). When you are having difficulty watching, there are in the church others who watch out for you. They see the enemy

approaching, and they call out to warn you; but if you have wandered off out of earshot, how shall you hear?

Fourth, an indulging of your lusts and a feeding of your sinful nature by worldliness gives place to the devil. If you are enamored with the world, the devil has you in his sights. He looks for an opening through your senses (especially your eyes and ears). Many souls he has ensnared by offering them attractive bait. What is he presenting to your senses?

There is one final thing to consider. Do not become so frightened by the devil that you forget Christ. The vigilant believer keeps his eyes on Christ. There is healthy fear of Satan, but there is also a morbid, obsessive fear of Satan. Christ is mightier than the devil. The devil is like a roaring lion, but Jesus Christ is the lion of Judah, and Christ's roar terrifies Satan. Christ defeated the devil at the cross. He defeated him in the wilderness, when he refused to yield to temptation. He defeated him in Gethsemane, when he consented to take the Father's cup. He defeated him at the cross, when he refused to come down from the cross. And he defeated him in the resurrection, ascension and session at God's right hand.

Therefore you are not in danger as long as you stay close to Christ. If you do fall, and if you have been mauled by the lion, run to Christ. He will restore you. He will bind up your wounds. He will forgive you, for he died for you.