

Small but wise (Prov. 30)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I would like to read just five more verses from Scripture, and these verses are taken from the 30th chapter of the Proverbs, from verses 24 to 28.

Verse 24 of Proverbs 30, There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceedingly wise.

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.

The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.

The locusts have no king, yet go they forth, all of them, by bands.

[00:01:03] The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings palaces.

My subject this afternoon is small but wise, small but wise.

This Scripture that we've just read in Proverbs, I think clearly teaches that wisdom is not measured by physical size.

How profoundly true that is.

A big man may have a very small mind, or a little body may shelter a truly great soul.

How many times we've found this to be true. It is of course true that God may speak to us by the vast, and the majestic, and the wonderful.

[00:02:03] The psalmist tells us, doesn't he, in the 19th Psalm, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

But the point is that God doesn't only speak to us by the wonder of the heavens, but by the small and the insignificant things, the seemingly insignificant things of earth.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, the well-known Scripture, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. All Scripture.

May we not say then that these verses have a message. They have a message for us today.

[00:03:02] Now whether we be conscious of our smallness or not, or whether we are conscious of our lack of wisdom or not, these words surely may speak to us, each one.

In the book of Job, we have recorded the words of Elihu, a young man.

And he said this, Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand justice.

Well, Elihu was a young man, so of course he would talk that way, wouldn't he, about the aged. But you know, Paul bears out the truth of what he had to say. He writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God.

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.

[00:04:06] But then this isn't only true, is it, of the world. But I think that even as believers, we are not wise in ourselves.

We are not wise of ourselves.

Our source of wisdom is the Lord, our blessed Saviour, who is made unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And why?

So that no flesh should glory in his presence.

And so we consider these four creatures, the ants, the conies, the locusts, and the spider.

The ants, we read, are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.

[00:05:09] The ants are a people.

What a strange expression.

The ants are a people not strong. It might indeed seem strange to us that God should use this expression concerning the ants. You know, God does not use unnecessary words, or words without meaning, in any context.

The ants are a close-knit community, dependent upon one another.

I don't know whether you've ever studied the ant, I can't say that I have particularly, but from all that I've read about the ants, they're a most amazing creature. And they are very like people because they are so close-knit, and because they are so dependent on one another.

[00:06:03] Now, it is not, I think, that we should be regimented, and in this sense, like soldiers, be exactly the same as each other.

It's true that the Christian is a soldier, but we remember that it was as an individual that Timothy was exhorted by Paul to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, as an individual.

But it's the collective sense that I want to think of here. So that you see the expression people indicates not only dependence, but variety. Variety.

How varied people are.

I'm sure that we're all aware of this, and the study of people is the most interesting and fascinating thing. [00:07:02] You've only got to stand in a bus queue and notice how different people are. Or at the entrance to a railway station in the rush hour, and see it along in the short and the tall and the fat and the thin. The infinite variety that there is among people. And there's a great variety among the members of the body of Christ. There is variety of function, there's variety of gift. And we have to recognize this.

We are, as the people of God, dependent upon one another. Everyone is important.

There's a great variety amongst us. And we must allow for this, and not try, as sometimes alas we do try, to regiment each other and make us all the same to one precise pattern. For there is room in God's purposes for this infinite variety amongst the people of God.

[00:08:05] So that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee, as our brother read to us, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of thee. We're all of importance to each other.

And just as each member of our body is necessary to the function of the whole body, so each member of the body of Christ is important to the whole. If only we could recognize this more than we do recognize it. So that we never, in effect, either in our thoughts or in our words, so to speak, write anybody off and say, well, we don't need to consider them. We do. We do.

So that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of thee. We're all important to each other, dependent upon one another, as well as upon the Lord.

[00:09:08] Then notice that it says that the ant prepares her meat in the summer. We might notice in Proverbs chapter 6, the expression that is used in verse 6 there, go to the ant thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise. The ant might well be concerned for the future, so wisely she prepares her food in good time. She prepares her food in the summer, her meat. So with a believer, so with a believer whose food is God's word, and it has to be stored, it has to be prepared.

I wonder if we do this with God's holy word. I know we come along to these meetings, these Catford lectures, [00:10:01] and we attend ministry elsewhere, but how much does each one of us store up God's word and prepare it?

The preparation I think is by prayer. Scripture reading shouldn't be a perfunctory thing, sort of a religious academic exercise, but it should be something that is preceded by and accompanied with prayer, much prayer. For when we open this book, we are opening God's word. We need to pray about it as we read it, so that we prepare ourselves to receive it, and then we store it up, as does the ant who prepares her meat in the summer. How wisely the psalmist again says, in that wonderful

prayer of his in the 119th Psalm, Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

[00:11:05] You see, the study of God's word requires prayer, so that we might prepare it, and then store it up.

Now one last thought before leaving our friends the ants. In Luke chapter 12, we have the story, don't we, of the rich fool. The man who said to his soul, soul that has much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry.

Well, was he not wise?

No, he was not wise.

And he was not wise for this reason, that though he spoke to his soul, he only made provision for his body. That's all.

Now true wisdom is in storing up God's word, and making provision of a spiritual character for my spiritual being. [00:12:03] This is what we need.

The result of it was, with that man, that he was not rich toward God. So God, instead of commending him for his wisdom, had to say to him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.

And may I say just this, I know this isn't a gospel meeting, but if there is a person here this afternoon, who isn't yet a Christian, who is not yet a believer, who does not rightly value the things of God, will you take that scripture to heart? True wisdom is in making provision not only for your body, but for your soul. And you may do that by reading his word, and learning the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. The answer are people not strong. Oh no, they're not strong. [00:13:01] A man may just put his foot down and crush fifty of them in one go, just like that, and be unaware that he's done it. They're not strong relative to mankind, but yet they are wise, in that they make provision for the future.

And then we come to our friends the Cones in verse 26, and we read that they are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rock.

They are feeble, but they are wise.

Now the Coney is like our rabbit, but they tell me that the Coney is even weaker than our rabbit. They are exceedingly feeble, but they are exceedingly wise. Now the Coney's wisdom I think is seen in this way, it is seen in its recognition of its own weakness, [00:14:01] its acknowledgement of its own weakness, and its seeking shelter among the rocks.

What a wonderful lesson for the believer, who is indeed weak.

And how many times we remind ourselves of the fact, we are a feeble folk, but our God is strong, the rock is strong.

You see where the Coney is concerned, the Coney who is so weak, but who makes his house in the rock. What a wonderful picture it is. The tenant is weak, but the habitation is strong.

And this is the blessing for the Coney, who in time of danger can go into that rock and be safe from any danger that threatens it.

One of the greatest lessons I am absolutely certain, for every believer to learn is his own inherent weakness.

[00:15:04] It is so.

We have to learn it sometimes the hard way, but we do have to learn it, our own inherent weakness. Paul said, and we were reminded of his words, when I am weak, then am I strong.

Well you might say, whatever did he mean? How contradictory.

When I am weak, then am I strong.

Well Paul, like many another, since Paul, and indeed living today, Paul suffered from a thorn in the flesh.

We are not told what it was.

But God gave it to him with much wisdom, so that he shouldn't be exalted above measure, to keep him humble.

But this thorn in the flesh troubled him. It weakened him.

Oh yes it did, it weakened him. [00:16:01] And he besought the Lord to remove it.

But the Lord said, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

And so Paul was able to say what he did say. When I am weak, then am I strong.

For then it is, knowing our own weakness, we turn to the Lord who is strong. The Cones are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rock.

They are weak, but the rock is strong, and our Lord is so strong.

When I used to be at this place, it's quite true Mr. Ransom, this is my home ground, I remember back before the war, we used to sing choruses before the gospel, and one of the choruses that I loved to have, was that chorus, My Lord is so strong, is so strong.

[00:17:02] It is true, we are weak, but he is strong. Now supposing the Cones were to say, Well, we are feeble, but there's nothing we can do about it. We're made this way, so we've no responsibility. You know, this is just how people talk. They say, I'm made this way, I'm just like this, there's nothing I can do. I just happen to be weak in this work.

Well now, supposing the Cone were to go on to say, Well, as for the rocks, well, there's no use me going there. Surely there's no point in that. Now supposing the Cone were to argue like this, I think that we'd be inclined to say, that not only was the Cone weak physically, but that he was weak

mentally too. Wouldn't we?

No, the clear thing, the God-given instinct that the Cone has, being weak, to seek the shelter of the rock, [00:18:01] which is strong.

He goes to the rock and he is safe. And this is a wonderful illustration of just what the Christian may do. Now I know that the world would criticise this attitude on the part of the believer. And the world would say, well, that's escapism. That's failing to face up to things as they really are. My friends, it is not escapism. It is sanctified common sense.

The acknowledgement that I am weak. And then I go to the Lord who is strong. That's what it is.

We need to learn the lesson.

What did David do?

David, when he was threatened by Saul and he was in fear of his very life, he went to the rock cave of Adullam. That's where he went. And in the shelter of that cave, he knew the security that God gave to him. He did the wise and the sensible thing. [00:19:03] It was his place of refuge.

What did Nehemiah do?

What did Nehemiah do when Nehemiah was so afraid as he stood before the king? Well, he didn't go anywhere physically.

But we read that in the moment of his distress and perplexity, in that very moment as he stood before the king, he said, I prayed to the God of heaven. What was he doing?

He was going to the rock of his salvation. He was going to God in prayer.

For the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is saved.

And that's exactly what Nehemiah did on that occasion. He didn't have time to physically go anywhere. And yet he went into the presence of the Lord as he stood before the king. What did the great apostle Paul do [00:20:03] when as a prisoner he was bound for Rome? No hope before him, humanly speaking. Nothing but death stared him in the face. But on the road to Rome at the Apiphor, when he saw those who had come to meet him, what did he do? He thanked God and he took courage.

He took courage. Oh, I like that scripture. He took courage.

My dear friends, doesn't it suggest to us that the courage was there to be taken. It was available to him. And so he took it. He thanked God and he took courage.

He took it from God who was the rock of his salvation. Available to Paul and available to you and to me.

Then what did Joseph do when Joseph was faced with that most appalling temptation, that moral

temptation? [00:21:02] What did he do?

Why, his place of safety lay in remembering the God whom he served. And this was his resource. How can I do this great wickedness, he said, and sin against God?

He thought of who he was and whom he served. And the knowledge of whose he was and whom he served kept him from that awful evil.

Now supposing Joseph had succumbed, Joseph would never have become the beautiful and wonderful type of our blessed Savior that he is.

But he remembered whose he was. He remembered the God whom he served. And he said, how can I do this great wickedness? Oh, I know he suffered, boy. I know he went into prison and he suffered. But in the end he was blessed, for God was with him. His resource was God.

[00:22:02] I'm reminded of the story of a man who of whom, and I imagine he must have been in a company similar to ours, who used to pray at the prayer meeting, one prayer, and he would pray it again and again and again, until some of his friends began to get a little tired of hearing this so often repeated prayer, for there seemed to be so little reality. And his prayer was this, Lord, sweep the cobwebs out of my life.

Lord, sweep the cobwebs out of my life. And he prayed it so many times, nothing ever seemed to happen. The cobwebs seemed to stay.

And on one occasion when he got up yet again and prayed the same prayer, a dear man who was present, and I believe a godly man too, also jumped up and he said, No, Lord, don't you do it, Lord. Kill the spider. Kill the spider. Yes, there's a spider that causes the cobwebs. [00:23:03] Let us go to the Lord who can kill the spider and remove the evil that threatens. This is what Joseph did.

And so for the Konies are feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rock. They are weak, but the rock is strong.

And then in verse 27 we have the locusts, the locusts. We read that they have no king, yet they go forth, all of them, by bands, by bands.

Now no one would pretend that the locust was a great benefactor of mankind.

One of the plagues of Egypt was that of the locusts and what a terrible plague it was.

They tell me that they suddenly descend upon a district and when they finish with the district there just isn't a square inch of vegetation left. They're absolutely devastating in what they do. [00:24:02] And as a point of interest, Joel refers to them in these words. In these words he says, the land before them is as the Garden of Eden and behind them a desolate wilderness, so effective is the work of the locusts. Well, whatever we think of them, the point is this, they are highly successful.

They are highly successful and this success is due to their wisdom in what?

In working together, that's it.

Their success is due to their working together and here they show their wisdom. I believe that the teaching here is acting for the common good and not being concerned over much about being the leader. Oh, you know, there's such a spirit very often, oh yes, I'll help.

In effect we say, I'll help as long as I'm in charge [00:25:02] or if only we could have this spirit of working together, working together for the faith of the gospel, for the common good.

They go forth by bands.

They go forth by bands. I'm not thinking of the Salvation Army and I'm not suggesting that we should do what they do and go forth with bands, although many seem to interpret their service for the Lord in this particular way. But the point is that they go forth as a company, as a united company.

Now let's be clear about this. There are circumstances where a leader is necessary and just such a work is the Sunday school, shall we say. There is need for a leader, a superintendent, one in charge and this is according, I'm sure, to the mind of the Lord. But the great thing to remember surely is this. One is your master even Christ and all ye are brethren, brethren with a small b, [00:26:05] working together as a band, as a company. Now the locust afford a wonderful illustration, I think, of just how a local assembly may function and this is very much upon my heart. Without visible or overriding authority, they have no king.

There is a God-given instinct where the locust is concerned and because of this God-given instinct they act in unison. They act together.

Now an interesting point is that they are bought by the wind. Don't read it in this scripture but it's a fact. That when the locusts come they come with the wind. To my mind that's a wonderful illustration for the wind is a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God [00:27:02] and so it is that believers, every one of us in the body, in the band if you will, baptized by one spirit into one body may keep the unity of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace. We may do that because the authority is there although it's invisible. The authority is God's.

The authority is the spirit of God's. Invisible but working in the assembly.

How wonderfully I think the hymn writer expressed it when he wrote in that hymn, immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes. It's true.

We do not see the saviour. We do not see the Holy Spirit and no man has seen God at any time [00:28:03] but the authority is there and so we find that these little creatures, these locusts work effectively without visible authority but oh how effective they are and so may we as little companies of God's people in Catford, in Bromley, in this district or that district or be it where it may, that testimony can be powerful for the Lord because it is directed by our invisible blessed saviour.

The Holy Spirit himself will guide and lead in the life and function of the assembly as we are subject to him.

And then lastly we have the spider.

The spider.

We read that the spider taketh hold with her hands and is in king's palaces.

[00:29:03] Now the spider is thought by some to be the lizard. I believe it's translated as lizard in JND and I think in other translations also. Now the lizard has wide feet rather like hands and so it would be sensible to suppose that this is the case. She taketh hold with her hands and I've never yet seen a spider with hands but of course it may well be that this creature is a spider but don't let's be concerned with that. Spider or lizard, let's see what she does. She taketh hold with her hands and is in king's palaces. Now here the great thought I think is endurance. Holding on.

She taketh hold.

Now will you notice with me here that the noun is singular in distinction to the others. Hitherto it's been plural [00:30:02] but here it's singular. It's perseverance.

Personal effort.

Keeping on.

Holding on.

And there's a need for this today, isn't there? There's a need for this today in an individual way. How to Timothy 2 comes to mind.

To endure hardness, we've already referred to it. To endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And we read in that same chapter study to show thyself approved unto God.

A workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Rightly dividing the word of truth.

This was the instruction to an individual believer to do just this.

And we need to study that we need to be approved unto God.

Paul could say of himself, couldn't he, in that same epistle I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. [00:31:04] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Personal and individual effort is something that is called for in the service of God. You, my dear young brother, may have a very real gift from the Lord. I'm quite sure that you have. Use it.

Use it for the Lord.

As the Spirit of God directs. And you, my dear young sister, are also gifted. For I believe that every Christian is gifted by our gracious Lord. Discover your gift and use it. It's an individual and a personal responsibility. But it needs to be worked out with perseverance. There needs to be this holding on. She take it hold with her hands and is in king's palaces. Now I want to turn from the thought of personal effort to the purpose of the spider in this context. [00:32:04] And you notice that it says she take it hold with her hand and is in king's palaces.

Now I've heard a great deal said about this. But to me this is a wonderful picture of what the Lord's coming can mean to the believer. Now this may not be like this to you but to me this is how I view it.

The certainty of our entering the Lord's house does not depend upon me.

It doesn't depend upon us. It depends upon the Lord and his gracious word to us.

But the joy of it the joy of it is ours by faith. Now we hold the coming of the Lord as a doctrine, don't we? In our company we view the coming of the Lord as a certainty. We teach it. We preach it. [00:33:01] We hold it as a doctrine. But how much does it mean to us? How much does it mean to us personally? Personally and individually.

She take it hold with her hand.

She take it hold with her hand. The joy of it is ours by faith. So let us then with the hands of faith the scripture says lay hold upon the hope that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus.

Looking unto Jesus.

And as we read elsewhere looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is making this glorious truth my own. We appropriate it by faith.

I was looking the other day at a hymn that I'm very very fond of and I'm quite sure many of you here are fond of it too. [00:34:01] It's one of that tremendous collection of hymns by Fanny Crosby and it's called Saved by Grace.

And this is how the first verse goes. Someday the silver cord will break and I no more as now shall see but oh the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King.

She taketh hold with her hand and is in King's palaces.

Oh my dear Christian friends what does the coming of the Lord mean to you? This is something which we must do more than just hold as a doctrine. As an essential truth of scripture by faith we have to make it our own. Make it our own. The Lord is coming.

The Lord is coming. He's promised to come. He's gone to prepare a place for us and surely to us it is the palace of the King of Kings. [00:35:05] The Lord of Lords.

Our Saviour. She taketh hold with her hand and is in King's palaces.

So may the thoughts of our Lords return. Be to us a living bright reality as the days get darker.

May our hope be brighter for the days are getting darker but let our hope be brighter in the knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ will come. He that shall come will come and will not tarry.

So may we be as those who are looking for him looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

May we take hold of this and be blessed as a result for his life's sake.

Amen.