

Proverbs 30

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[0 : 00] where children will be dismissed to their programs, but our summer months, their teachers are yet getting a much-needed reprieve. And so we are all here together.

And so I'm going to ask you, men, women, and children alike, to take a Bible that's near you. There should be one in the pew rack if you haven't brought one with you.

And open to Proverbs chapter 30. This summer, if you're new to our congregation, we have been traveling through the book of Proverbs in a series titled The Way of Wisdom.

And we have noticed that the book of Proverbs is given to us in seven distinct collections. And today we are nearing the end of our series.

Next week we will finish. And today we come to the sixth collection of wise sayings within the book. And so whether you are seven years old or 77, your eyes upon the text today will be a great benefit to you.

[1 : 12] Proverbs chapter 30. I'm going to read the entire chapter, and because of its length, I'm just going to ask you to remain seated. The words of Eger, son of Jehah, the oracle.

The man declares, I am weary, O God. I am weary, O God, and worn out. Surely I am too stupid to be a man.

I have not the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom. Nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended to heaven and come down?

Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name? And what is his son's name?

Surely you know. Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

[2 : 16] Two things I ask of you. Deny them not to me before I die. Remove far from me falsehood and lying. Give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Do not slander a servant to his master, lest he curse you and you be held guilty. There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers.

There are those who are clean in their own eyes, but not washed of their filth. There are those how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift.

There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind. The leech has two daughters.

[3 : 18] Give and give, they cry. Three things are never satisfied. Four never say enough. Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says enough.

The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. Three things are too wonderful for me.

Four I do not understand. The way of an eagle in the sky. The way of a serpent on a rock. The way of a ship on the high seas. And the way of a man with a virgin.

This is the way of an adulteress. She eats and wipes her mouth and says, I have done no wrong. Under three things the earth trembles. Under four it cannot bear up.

A slave when he becomes king. And a fool when he's filled with food. An unloved woman when she gets a husband. And a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.

[4 : 29] Four things on earth are small. But they are exceedingly wise. The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in summer.

The rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs. The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank. The lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in king's palaces.

Three things are stately in their tread. Four are stately in their stride. The lion, which is the mightiest among beasts and does not turn back before any.

The strutting rooster. The he-goat. And a king whose army is with him. If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.

For pressing milk produces curds. Pressing the nose produces blood. And pressing anger produces strife. This is the word of the Lord.

[5 : 45] Thanks be to God. Many verses Many things said.

And if you're an early reader of the Bible, it can be a bit overwhelming. Where to begin?

I want to introduce our text with this word of advice. On Bible reading.

The first thing to do in reading a text like this, a complete section, whenever you come to it in your daily reading, and we all ought to be trying to read the Bible daily, would be to pray.

Lord, God, help me to understand something. And we pray because we believe that the Bible gives us the very word of God by the author, in a sense, His Spirit.

[6 : 58] And so as God's Spirit has created this word, God's Spirit, God's Spirit, is the one who helps you gain understanding to the word.

So if you're here today and you heard the lengthy reading and thought, oh my word, we're in for a long day. Many words, many things said.

Or if you're reading this week, never having read the Bible regularly at all, I tell you, do that first. Pray, Lord, help me understand your word.

And he does. He does. He really does. The second thing, with a text this long, is to put your power of observation to work.

There's no shortcut to Bible reading. It's not the easiest of daily exercises.

[8 : 01] It requires you some time to meditate. So carve out enough time to not only pray, but to put your powers of observation to work.

And if you do this regularly over a long period of time, while it might not be easy at first, no reading you do will be as enjoyable or as rewarding.

And so, we have prayed. Lord, help us to understand this word today. And now, we look at it with our powers of observation.

And what do we see? What's here? Well, the title, of course, the words of Agur, son of Jehah, the oracle. the oracle, the word.

In ancient Greek civilization, the oracle could have been a word given by a god or a priest or a priestess that was certain to be true.

- [9 : 11] So, what we have here is a word given by one, it says here, the words of Agur, that is declared to be from God.
- This is God's word. And when we read God's word, what do you see? Take a look. As simply as possible, I think we see two overarching ideas.
- The first is of a man. We see a man. Verse 1, the man declares, I am weary, O God, I am weary, O God, and worn out.
- And that depiction of a man, a solitary man, moves all the way through verse 9. It's the man there that is still speaking, isn't he?
- When you look down to verse 9. So, with just a short amount of time, this confusing and overwhelming and rather large and disjointed chapter, comes to focus.
- [10 : 24] It's a word about a man. Verses 1-9. And then, verse 10, things change, and we see this phrase in 11 and 12 and 13 and 14.
- There are those, there are those, there are those, there are those. So, the chapter gives us the portrait of a man among an entire generation of men.
- And, and that generation, we hear these phrases, there are those, verse 11, who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers, which is a phrase repeated at verse 17, an eye that mocks a father and scorns a mother.
- We see that from 10 through 17, a generation of men. Now, with that, you begin to come back to 1-9 and say, what is this word from God about this man?
- And I want us to almost approach the text as if we were coming up upon him in our daily life, in his solitary state.
- [11 : 48] I want us to see this man and these men. And as we come upon him, observe him, what do you find him doing? What do you notice?
- He's in the act of prayer. This is a man who prays. The man declares, I am weary.
- Not just I am weary to anyone on the street, 53rd or otherwise. I am weary, O God! And when you get down to verse 7, you see he is still in prayer.
- Two things I ask of you. Deny them not before I die. this collection begins with a man, a man in prayer.
- A man in prayer. He's a wise man, for only the fool says there is no God.
- [12 : 53] God. So this is the oracle, the word. It's given us a portrait of a man who must be the embodiment of this whole book of Proverbs.
- The one to whom the whole book is moving. We see now the wise man. And he's a man who prays. draw closer.
- You can even hear him. His words now are audible and the words reveal something. I hear him in his private prayers.
- And he is speaking with words that reveal weariness of his pursuit of wisdom. We've been studying wisdom all summer long.
- We've now met the man of the book. And what does he pray? I am weary. I am weary. I am worn out.
- [14 : 01] Just physically tired? No. What is the weariness of soul with which he approaches God in the heavens? It is nothing less verse 2 than I'm too stupid to even be a man.
- I have not the understanding of a man. I haven't been able to get wisdom. I haven't been able to get wisdom. Do you hear the echo in his voice of one of the other wisdom books?

There are three wisdom books in the Bible. What are they? They are this book of Proverbs. They are that book of Job. They are that book of Ecclesiastes. Those are the wisdom books.

And this phrase of a man who is weary, having not been able to attain it, is the echo of which other wisdom book? Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes, where there is this sense of futility. For the one in Ecclesiastes saw that the same thing occurs to both the wise and the foolish.

[15 : 14] The wise die just like the foolish. And so he realizes that although he knows there is God, and although he has given himself to God, he also understands the echo of Ecclesiastes, where all things are vanity.

I think it's worth taking a look at that echo. Turn over to Ecclesiastes. It's the book that follows Proverbs. It's nice that it's so close.

Even if you don't know your Bible at all, there's at least hope for you here. Ecclesiastes follows Proverbs. In Ecclesiastes 1.16, I said in my heart, I have acquired great wisdom surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge, and I applied to my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly, and I perceive that this also is but a striving after the wind.

Turn over to that great wisdom book in chapter 2, verse 12, so I turn to consider wisdom and madness and folly for what can the man do who comes after the king only what has already been done.

Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head but the fool walks in darkness. In other words, although he calls wisdom vanity in one sense, he understands that it's better to be wise than to be But he says there in verse 15 of chapter 2, I said in my heart what happens to the fool will happen to me also.

[16 : 59] Verse 17, So I hated life because what is done under the sun was grievous to me for all is vanity and is striving after the wind. Turn to that same voice in chapter 9.

Chapter 9 and verse 14. There was a little city with a few men in it and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it, but there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city.

Yet no one remembered that poor man. Isn't that often the case for those who seek wisdom and who find it and actually begin to live under the very word of God? No one under the sun remembers.

But he says, I say, verse 16, that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. And how does the book of Ecclesiastes end?

Chapter 12, verses 11 and 12, the words of the wise are like goads, like nails.

[18 : 13] Firmly fixed are the collected sayings. they are given by one shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these.

In other words, he moves you to the very words that have made him weary in this world. He says, of the making of many books there is no end and much study is what?

A weariness to the flesh. We've seen this man. He is the man in Proverbs and I'm glad he's here in Proverbs lest you and I think at the conclusion of our series that we have told you get wisdom, go for wisdom, thinking, misleading you all the while, that if you will get wisdom all will go well.

Without this collection of chapter 30, the whole book of Proverbs collapses in my mind. This is the balancing weight of life in a real world.

Oh God, I believe you exist, I speak to you, I try to do what is well, and I am weary. Well, we've come upon this man in an hour of great need.

[19 : 39] but there's more. Listen to him. He goes on, verse 3, I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.

There's almost this longing. I want wisdom, but how can I really, in this world, in my finite state, have a knowledge of the Holy One?

And so he begins to wax with rhetorical flair, as if he's saying, how can I really possess it?

I mean, look at his questions, five in number. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? In other words, this is impossibly hard. How do I get up to heaven to be wise and then come down and live in the world well?

Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in his garments? Who's established the ends of the earth? What is his name?

[20 : 40] What is his son's name? I mean, would he even have a son? Surely, he says to God, you must know, because I don't.

So, the wise man, notice, is a praying man. And in his prayers, they are marked with this real world weddedness to the futility of life.

But they are also marked with deep humility of soul. Who has known?

Who has been there? He's humble. the wisest one is the most humble of all. Well, that reminds me of Socrates.

I'm sure it reminds you of Socrates as well, doesn't it? I wasn't going to use it here, at least in this place, in the message, but I think he's come, hasn't he? Plato's apology, Socrates is on trial for his life.

[21 : 58] And he references that event that took place in the 40th year where his whole life changed because a friend of his, Chirophon, goes to Delphi to consider of the oracle.

And it goes to the temple in Delphi and asks, who is the wisest man of all? And the priestess responds with an oracle, there's no one wiser than Socrates, which was the birth of all of his trouble.

And so in his own apology, when he is before the court, he says that he went to make an investigation of this. I'm quoting from the translation by Thomas West, 1979, Julia Annis in the Yale series, her commentary, her translation on this is not yet done.

So West translates it this way. Socrates on his way to find out whether he's truly the wisest man. He says, I went to one of those reputed to be wise.

I need not speak of him by name, but he was one of the politicians. Oh my, you think of as a Chicagoan. And I considered him and conversed with him.

[23 : 45] Men of Athens, I was affected something like this. Socrates goes on, for my part I went away.

I reasoned with regard to myself. Well, I am wiser than this human being, for probably neither of us knows anything noble and good, but he supposes that he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do.

I'm likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing, that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know. The great Socratic moment of ignorance.

Not that he knows nothing at all, but he would not claim to know that which he does not know. We could use a dose of that everywhere in our country.

from there, he says, I went on to someone else, to one of those reputed to be wiser than he, and these things seemed to me to be the same, and this then I kept going to one after another, all the while perceiving with pain and fear that I was becoming hated.

[24 : 58] Nevertheless, it seemed to be necessary to regard the matter of the God as most important, so I had to go in considering what the oracle was saying to all those reputed to know something, and by the dog, men of Athens, what a wonderful phrase, swearing by the dog, and by the dog, men of Athens, for it is necessary to speak the truth before you, I swear I was affected something like this, those with the best reputations seem to be me nearly the most deficient.

The wisest person will always be the humblest person, which is the supreme argument against somebody like Dawkins today, who declares like the fool, there is no God.

There's no humility of spirit in the declaration anymore, and even science itself begins to get ripped apart by the dogmatic arrogance of those whose heads are high and lofty and lifted up.

And on this day when you entered into this church, you have come upon this man, a praying man, a wise man, a humble man, a weary man.

Well, there is another echo here, isn't there? Believe me, I'm not going through the whole text today, so don't worry. I will be done shortly.

[26 : 39] The echo is not only of Ecclesiastes and its weariness, but there is an echo of Job here too, isn't there? With these rhetorical questions, who has gathered the wind in his fists?

Who has wrapped up the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? These are the kinds of questions in Job 38 and 39 that God finally asks of Job who was a righteous and wise man.

What was Job's ultimate problem? Eliehu from chapter 31 on really put his finger on it. Job had come to the point in his life where he nearly thought that because he did all things well, God owed him something.

In other words, he had almost come to where he was wise in his own eyes. And that's the final word in the book of Job that Eliehu gives to Job before God speaks.

It is fascinating. The final word to Job is therefore men fear him.

[27 : 53] He does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit. And as soon as that word comes to Job, God finally speaks. And he comes and he says, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Dress for action like a man. A man. You think you're a man, Job? Dress like a man, I've come.

And then God just thunders out with these questions. Where were you? Who are you? And Job learned his lesson. And what was the lesson? I should have been quiet.

And so we begin to come to a full consideration of this. This man is characterized in our chapter Proverbs by two things. He's characterized by a man of being a man of prayer.

And he's also characterized by silent reverence in the presence of God's word. Take a look. This is so vastly important to us. In Proverbs chapter 30, after that, what do you have in verses 5 and 6?

[29 : 06] In the midst of his prayer, you have this incredible declaration, every word of God proves true. Every word, this like plenary inspiration. Every word of God proves true.

He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. do not add to his words lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar. Those are the characteristics of a wise man.

You want to be wise? You have to be a person of prayer. You have to believe that a God exists. Do you believe God exists? Do you ever pray? Do you ever say, Oh God?

There's no wisdom without that. And do you reverence his word? This is the way of wisdom.

Those are the two commitments toward godliness. And he's also known for only two requests. Take a look at them. Verses 7-9. Two requests.

[30 : 12] And what are they? keep falsehood away from me. And give me my daily bread. Two characteristics.

Two requests. Falsehood away. Daily bread presence. Not too much. Not too little. I know I'll go astray with either.

Well, how do we apply this? Of course, you ought to be reverently listening to his word. Well, right back where we started at the beginning of the sermon, as we now draw toward the close, that these words are God's words.

We ought to reverence them. This summer, I've read Metaxas' biography on Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer, who was the prized pupil of Harnack, the great fountainhead of textual criticism.

He was a laborer and friend alongside Barth and Bonhoeffer. When he began to grapple with the authority of the word, it is said through the letters of others that he would say, when you read the Bible, you must think that here and now, God is speaking with me.

[31 : 29] He wasn't abstract. Rather, from the beginning, he taught us that we had to read the Bible as it was directed at us, as the word of God directly to us.

Not something general, not something generally applicable, but rather with a personal relationship to us. He repeated this to us very early on, that the whole thing comes from that.

And that's what I would say here on the streets of Hyde Park, the same thing. The whole thing comes from that. Do you reverence at God's word? You have seen this man in chapter 30, weary as he is, reverencing God's word.

Well, I should at least show you the other generation of men in which he lives, shouldn't I? Is it too hot or do you have time for five more minutes? Who is this generation then?

Well, they are those who curse their fathers, verse 11, and don't bless their mothers. They are those who are clean in their own eyes, but not washed to their filth. They are those, how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift.

[32 : 39] Look at what this one does. This one does not speak to God in prayer, humbly, and receive his word. This one speaks to others in slanderous ways, and tries to elevate himself or themselves over everyone else.

That's the generation of the ungodly. And what are they marked by? What word are they marked by more than anything else? Give! Give! Never satisfied. Always more, always for me, always about myself.

That's how he categorizes the entire generation. And what is their end? Their end is stunning. It's almost apocalyptic. In fact, you find this language in apocalyptic language.

Their end is those who have abandoned their teachers, their father, their mother, the ones who would give them wisdom. Their eyes will be picked out by ravens, verse 17, in the valley, and they will be eaten by the vultures.

Is there an echo of this in the scriptures anywhere? Certainly. Is it not Goliath in 1 Samuel 17? The one who is depicted as the one who is lofty and high and above all others.

[33 : 49] It's the one who comes and curses the servant of the master. And David will turn it around and curse him, and God will stand with David and find Goliath a liar.

1 Samuel 17, Goliath would come, it says, in the morning and the evening. And what was his cry? Give me a man.

That's what the text says. Twice a day, give, give. This humble little young man, trusting in the very promises of God, says, you are flouting the authority of the Almighty, and I curse you, and what does he say?

I will defeat you, I will cut your head off, and I will give all your army to the birds. Such is their end.

And Goliath symbolizes what? The enemies of God all through the generations so that in Revelation there will be a feast for the vultures while the humble and contrite of spirit are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

[35 : 02] And who is this man? Who is the archetype of this enemy? Is it not the Lord Jesus Christ? Is he not the wisest of all?

He himself said, you know that Solomon is wise, but I tell you, someone wiser than Solomon is in your midst. Is he not the praying man, the humble man, the one in relationship to God?

Is he not the one who, in a sense, ironic twist on our verses, the way Ephesians takes them from Psalm 68, here our man is saying, how can I get up to heaven and then descend down to earth with wisdom?

And those phrases are turned in the psalm and they are applied to Jesus in Ephesians 4, for he is the one who had been everlastingly ascended and he descended, not only to earth, he descended to the grave that he might be the payment of all of our unrighteousness and then he ascended to heaven bringing all the gifts with him and he is there for you, do you want wisdom?

I give you Jesus, the man and all who bend their knee to him will be invited to the wedding supper and all who do not will be like Goliath and they will be fed to the birds and when that falls into place, the remaining three and four sayings, well it just all cracks open for you and beauty and you ought to go home this week and read them because he returns now to those things that are too wonderful for him.

[36 : 42] What's too wonderful for him? The way of wisdom in contrast to the way of the adulteress. And four things are small.

You see they're small, they're tiny, they're humble, you wouldn't think they would be able to get much done, but those four things are really great. And sitting alongside those in parallel fashion, under three things the earth quakes, under four it cannot bear up, a slave when he's become a king, these are like Goliath, these are like the generation of men.

And as it was in verses 21 through 23, so it is in 29 to 31, four things are stately, the lions, the rooster, the he-goat, and a king when he has his people with him.

All those things have come crashing down in this collection. And where are we left? In conclusion, what's the application of the text? Verses 32 and 33, if, here you are reader, here you are a person on 53rd street today, if you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth.

For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, pressing anger produces strife. The godly posture is one who is quiet in the presence of God.

[38 : 11] The one who is reverently submitting to his word, whether you understand it all or not, contradictions, etc. You are submitting and you are praying to him through Christ.

If you've been foolish, it's time for quiet. Our heavenly father, we thank you for this wonderful collection.

Use it to grow us. In Christ we pray. Amen.