

Go to the Ant

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning as we open the Word of God, we're going to consider some of his words of great wisdom. Over the past few weeks, I've been reading through the story of King Solomon, just in my own personal Bible reading, and some of Solomon's words of wisdom.

Maybe you know the story of King Solomon. King Solomon was the son of King David, and Solomon lived about a thousand years before Jesus was born.

From our day today, 3,000 years ago, since Solomon lived and was king. And it's not often someone that we talk about, but Solomon was one of the greatest kings who ever lived.

I love how his story begins. In his early years as king, Solomon had a real heart for God, just like his dad did. One day after he became king, he went up to a place called Gibeon.

And there at Gibeon was where the tabernacle was set up. And it's recorded that he offered a thousand burnt offerings to the Lord in one day.

[1 : 04] A burnt offering was a sacrifice of an animal to God. And I won't get into talking about the sacrificial system this morning, but it was a moment of worship for Solomon. It was a moment of extravagant worship that cost him greatly.

He held nothing back. And that night, God appeared to Solomon. God told Solomon that he could ask him for anything that he wanted.

And Solomon responded with such deep humility. He said to the Lord, Here I am. You've made me the king of your people. And who am I to rule over them?

Who am I to take care of them? To oversee the kingdom? To ensure that what's good and what's right and just is done among all these people of yours?

And so Solomon asked God for wisdom. He asked God for a wise and discerning heart. Specifically so that he could govern and lead the people well as their king.

[2 : 05] And God was so deeply pleased with Solomon's request that he answered and gave him what he asked for. In fact, God made Solomon not only the wisest man who had ever lived up until that point, but he made him into an even wiser man than any future man would ever be except for one.

And that, of course, is Jesus. As I was reading again about some of the wisdom that Solomon had, I was astounded by it. It says he was held in awe by all the people of Israel because of his great wisdom.

From the rulings and decisions he made to the way that he set up and organized the kingdom to the peace and prosperity that came to the whole nation and to everyone in it because of the things that he was doing.

And the people, it says, they knew, they understood that it was God who had given him this great wisdom. With his wisdom, he built the temple of the Lord.

Probably the most beautiful, ornate, maybe even the most expensive building ever made on earth. The most holy place, kind of just an inner part of the temple, was overlaid with about 21 metric tons of gold.

[3 : 23] By today's figures, that's almost a billion dollars worth of gold. Never mind the rest of the temple and its furnishings. Even the nails, apparently, in the most holy place were made of gold.

Only the best for the place where God would live among his people. And we might wonder, well, where did Solomon get all this wealth? God gave him unbelievable wisdom for trade and for foreign exchange and administration.

He was so wise that he was known across the world in his day. Listen to what it says in 1 Kings 4, verse 29.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the east and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezraite, wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol.

[4 : 31] I don't know who any of these guys are, personally, but I'm sure that the writer is just listing off all the wisest, the best thinkers, the greatest philosophers of Solomon's day. He was wiser than all of them.

And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs numbered 1,005. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the walls.

He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations, people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom.

You may have heard the story of the Queen of Sheba traveling up from the south to pay Solomon a visit, and she was just absolutely astounded and in awe by his kingdom and his wisdom.

At the height of Solomon's empire, his yearly, yearly intake of gold was about 23 tons. Again, almost a billion dollars by our valuing today.

[5 : 38] And then the author is careful to remind us, well, that was just the gold. Don't forget about all his revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and from all the governors of all the surrounding territories that he ruled over.

In 2 Chronicles 9, it says, He was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. All the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift, articles of silver and gold and robes, weapons and spices and horses and mules.

A little further down, The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones and cedar as plentiful as sycamore fig trees in the foothills.

Reflecting on the building of his palace, it says, Nothing was made of silver because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's day. Amazing.

[6 : 42] Apart from Jesus, Solomon was the wisest man the earth had ever known. And it's because God, the one who created the universe, gave him this great wisdom.

So let me ask you something this morning. If you had lived in Solomon's day, And by chance, you had been given an opportunity to come to his palace and to have a private gathering with him, a meeting with him, would you take that opportunity?

The chance to hear some of his great wisdom? Well, the amazing thing is that we have the very words that Solomon spoke right here in our Bibles today.

And so as I read from Proverbs chapter 6, I want you to imagine that that's where you are, that you've been invited here this morning to Solomon's palace, something that very few ordinary folk like you and me would ever get a chance to do, a private gathering with the legendary, world-renowned King Solomon.

What might he say to you? Imagine you're sitting there sipping a glass of something. The contents of the cup are so expensive that it's more than you can even, than your whole net worth.

[8 : 10] And you look around at the palace and you see the gold-decked walls. You see all of this amazing artwork that he's collected from all over the world, these amazing furnishings.

And you consider his great kingdom. And finally you come up with a question, something that you feel, well, maybe I should ask, I could ask this.

Your Majesty, King Solomon, how have you managed to accomplish all of this in under 40 years? It's really a question of astonishment and wonder.

But maybe if you're honest, you're looking for some priceless wisdom to help you out in your own life. And we all know the God answer to this question.

Solomon has accomplished all this by his wisdom, and his wisdom, as we have said, came as a special gift from God. God blessed the work of his hands, and that's how he did it.

[9 : 11] Without that, he would have just been another king of Israel. And of course, Solomon would have been an arrogant fool not to give God the credit and the glory for all that he had done in his great kingdom.

But on a different level, from a different angle, Solomon, can you give us some practical wisdom from God? How have you accomplished all this in less than 40 years? What might his response have been? Perhaps it would have been this. Proverbs 6, verse 6. Go to the ant, you sluggard.

Consider its ways and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

Can you imagine that? Here you are, sitting in the presence of one of the greatest, wisest, wealthiest kings who ever lived, and you're asking him for some practical wisdom to help you be more productive in life, and he basically says to you, go out into your backyard and sit down in the grass and watch some ants.

[10:39] If anybody else had answered your question like this, you might have laughed in their face. Are you kidding me? Human beings here, we're the most intelligent creatures on earth.

You're telling me to go learn a lesson from those tiny little guys that I accidentally step on in the backyard all the time? That's a good one. But then you look around again and you think of this magnificent palace and all Solomon has achieved.

Could it really be that Solomon himself, with the wisdom that God gave him, grew more wise by watching and studying ants?

You better believe it. God has a way of humbling us when we need to be humbled, of using the small and the weak and the lowly things to humble the proud and the strong.

Of all the things that God commands us to do in the Bible, this is perhaps one of the most surprising. Go watch the ants, he says.

[11:55] And of course, he doesn't mean just go look at them. I think most translations get it right when they say, consider its ways. Consider. Yes, watch them, but also think about them.

Reflect on what they're doing. Ponder them and learn wisdom from them. And then Solomon gives us just enough of a tidbit of what he's seen from watching the ants to get us started, to whet our wisdom appetite.

He says, you know, ants have no commander, no overseer, no ruler. You'll never see some of the ants just kind of standing on the side as the worker ants go by, making sure that all the ants are doing their jobs.

And if one of those ants decides to get out of line and slack off, you'll never see one of them go over there and smack it on the abdomen and say, get back to work. You'll never see that with ants.

They just do their jobs when nobody is looking. Now we might wonder why. Well, it's beyond us to figure out what really goes on in the brain of an ant or if they even have motivations.

[13:12] But let's consider for a moment with Solomon the challenges of the ant. He says, it stores its provisions in summer. And so we think of the challenge of winter.

How do those little critters survive up to six months of that? Canadian winters.

Think about this from the perspective of an ant. Six months of that must be like an ice age to them. Those piles of snow, those drifts must be like Everest's to them.

The whole world becomes a frozen, barren wasteland. And not only is the cold a threat, but the scarcity of food is a threat. In order to survive the winter, the ants must make some serious preparations.

They must prepare a fully functional underground bunker and it's got to be fully stocked and supplied to go all those months. They've got to get enough food to survive that whole long period even before it starts.

[14:26] And not only that, think of it in terms of the number of mouths to feed. Apparently the smaller ant colonies have about 500 ants in them, but they can go up to 10,000.

And I never knew this before this week, but they can even group with other colonies to form super colonies in the millions in some places. 500, let's go with the small number, 500 mouths to feed for six months.

It's not a perfect analogy because ants don't eat or function like we do, but just imagine trying to meal plan for 500 people for six months in an underground shelter with no contact with the outside world, no grocery stores to go shopping at.

That's going to take some serious planning and preparations to get the whole colony of 500 up to 10,000 through that. No wonder they work almost non-stop from the time that the snow melts to the time that it falls again.

If they didn't, there probably wouldn't be too many of them left. at least not up here in our climate. So how do they do it? It's their diligence.

[15:50] Maybe you've seen an ant doing some work. Maybe you've had ants in your home even. They're relentless. They're tireless.

They're persistent in their work all through those summer months. We might call them prudent. Whether they're actually planning or thinking ahead, I don't know. Probably God instilled them with some kind of natural instinct and programming, a God-given wisdom of sorts so that they can flourish and thrive according to his good design.

But it's the work itself that they do, all that work through the summer, that ensures their survival.

And boy, can ants work. have you ever taken the time just to watch ants at work?

I've had a couple good opportunities. When I lived in Edmonton, I remembered just marveling. We had a giant colony underneath the concrete pad in our backyard.

Every time I would put the lawnmower on there and start it up, the vibrations would send them out every side, thousands of them. It was amazing. I even tried wiping them all out a couple times because they were pretty close to the house.

[17:03] I didn't want them to get in. And yet, it seemed like within days, I'd do it again and there's thousands more. Where are these things coming from? Well, one day, these ants had found something tasty in the back alley.

And I couldn't believe it. I just watched as all in a line, about over 20 feet away, they just marched. All the way out, grabbed a hunk of whatever it was, I can't even remember.

It was about half the size of the ant. And then they would lug this thing all the way back to the colony. And they would just go back and forth all day long. It was amazing.

You tried to put something in the line, they would just go around and get back on the line and keep going. I was reminded of this all again this week because some ants actually found their way into my basement this past week here in Davidson.

I just noticed a little something scurrying across the floor in the washroom. Okay. Then another. Then another. Then another.

[18:13] Uh-oh. We got a problem here. I started following this trail of ants into the hallway, into my bedroom, going under my bed, and there's this little hole by the baseboard and the carpet.

And they, one by one, just crawling up out of that. All the way to the other side of the house, they were going in the bathroom, down the hallway, into the kids' bedroom. And then at the very end, you could see different ants kind of just wandering all over the place, scouting for any kind of food to eat.

It's amazing. They were doing that in the morning, first thing, when I saw them, and they were still going hard in the evening when I went to bed. Hopefully they got lots of good food from the ant traps that I put down for them, because I don't want to have a total infestation.

But amazing creatures, and according to God, they are creatures that we're meant to learn from.

Go to the ant, you sluggard. They are an example of wisdom, of diligence, of discipline.

You want to accomplish more in life? Then, says Solomon, you need to work like they do. You need to make the most of every opportunity you have to work while you have it.

[19:38] So how can we apply these words? How can we put them into practice? Well, if it's been a while since you last took some time to consider the ways of the ants, I'll invite you this week to even go out and take a few minutes to do some ant watching.

You're probably thinking that's funny. You can't be serious. What a waste of time. I'm not joking. I don't think Solomon was joking. I think he actually meant for us to take a close look and to understand the lesson.

So I want to encourage you to try that this week. And if you can't find some ants, there's lots of them on YouTube. And there's lots of phenomenal videos just showing the kinds of things they do.

I saw one little video clip of a wasp nest hanging from a roof. And a trail of ants, they made a bridge of themselves into the nest from on top of the roof.

And they were crawling on a chain of ants into this thing, invading the nest, dismantling it and taking it back to their colony for food. Amazing.

[20:48] There's other things, all kinds of things you can see. I'll let you search it up and see it. The second thing, and this is kind of a more general principle to consider.

Do you know that the entire created world is full of similar kinds of lessons? God has infused all of creation with his beyond measure wisdom.

Everything you see in nature points to his glory. Some things offer a practical wisdom lesson like this one. Others might give us creative inspiration for our own inventions and creations.

Think about it. this is not the only wisdom lesson in the Bible that's drawn from nature. Solomon will tell us many more things like this through the rest of his Proverbs and in Ecclesiastes.

Jesus will tell us to look at and consider the birds, to take a lesson from them and the flowers of the field. He pointed his disciples to seeds, to sowing and planting, to rain, to clouds, to thunder, to lightning.

[22 : 03] The men who wrote the Psalms pointed us to the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the seas and their powerful waves, the meadows and the grasses. There's lessons to be learned from all these things that God has made from sheep and goats, lions, the deer, and yes, even from the rock badgers that I saw at the Calgary Zoo last week.

They're actually in Proverbs, believe it or not. All of creation is filled with the wisdom of God. And so I want to encourage you this summer to open not just your eyes but your hearts to that possibility, to that reality.

I want to encourage you as you go your way this summer, maybe some of you are going on vacation, maybe you're going to be outside a little bit more because the weather is nice. You'll probably see lots of things but take some time to linger over them and ask God to open your heart to the wisdom, to the lessons that he has for you, even in the stuff of nature which he has made. Don't just go to the ant this summer, go to all of it. But back to the ant for a moment. None of us really wants to admit that we are a sluggard.

I don't even like that word. It's a pretty strong word, isn't it? I really like the Christian Standard Bible. It translates it a little differently. It says, go to the ant, you slacker.

[23 : 35] That's kind of a good modern day rendition of that. It's a word that's sometimes used in parallel with foolishness. And probably none of us wants to admit that we are foolish or sluggardish or a slacker or lazy.

But then we might wonder, well, how would I know if I am? How do you measure if you're working long enough or hard enough?

We can't always trust our feelings about it because the person who's lazy is a sack of potatoes feels like he's doing all he can each day. But on the other hand, must I always feel guilty about stopping to take some rest, to take a break, to take a night off?

We can't go by our feelings. And so probably the next thing that we'll do is we'll start to compare ourselves to others. But even that way of measuring is unreliable because truthfully we can all think of some people that work much harder, much longer than we do.

And we can all think of some people who compared to us seem lazy. Is a sluggard just someone who's really lazy compared to me? If that were the case, then this advice would only be for a very few people.

[25 : 00] Or is Solomon aiming this wise advice at a mindset, at a mentality, at an attitude that any of us can have? Is it possible that by God's measure, I am a sluggard?

Are you willing to ask that question of God this week? Lord, am I working long enough? Am I working hard enough?

Am I working on the right things? The things that are most important in life, the things that you would have me do? I want to encourage you to simply ask God some of these questions this week in prayer.

Because this is something that we need his help to see if it's in our lives. We need his spirit to convict us of this. And as we do that, let's not misunderstand the lesson from the ant.

It's not that we should work constantly and never rest. If we're listening carefully, Solomon, God is saying that we should work diligently when we have the opportunity to do so.

[26 : 16] Because a time or season or day is coming, may come, when that window of opportunity will be closed. And we can apply this to all sorts of things.

We could apply this to old age. There comes a day when you're no longer able to work like you're used to. Are you being careful to store up provisions for that day? Or are you going further and further and further into debt?

We could apply this to seasonal work. We all know that feeling of the leaves hitting the ground and, oh, we've got to get them up before the snow is coming. Sometimes we need to burn the midnight oil just to get things done.

We could apply this to the work of any given day. There's only so much light in a day. We have the opportunity to work during the day, to connect with people while they're awake during the day. But when evening rolls around, those doors start to close. We could apply this like Jesus did to the spiritual work of meeting the needs of others.

[27 : 21] Are we making the most of our opportunity to connect with others and to serve others, to reach out to people who don't know Christ and build relationships with them?

Because we know that eventually those opportunities, those doors will close for one reason or another. Whether the Lord takes us home or that person or their family move somewhere else. I want to encourage you to pray about this this week. You may not need to go to the aunt for a lesson about working more hours at your job or around your house.

But maybe when it comes to your spiritual life, you've been a slacker, a sluggard. Maybe you know that there's something in your life that you really should be working at, but you've been putting it off and putting it off and putting it off.

So I just want to simply encourage you to ask the Lord about this this week. And I trust that he will show you, that he will show me as I ask him to what we need to hear, what is really going on in our hearts this week.

[28 : 30] And the good news is this. When we ask, God gives grace. He gives help. He gives strength to those who earnestly and humbly seek it from him.

So let's do that. Lord Jesus, we thank you for this lesson, this simple, practical lesson of wisdom that you've put into your word.

God, we pray that you would put it deep in our hearts. Make us diligent in all the areas of life that matter most. help us to see where we need to change, where we need to grow.

Open our eyes to the countless lessons that you would have us learn this summer through all that we see that you have made. We love you.

We give you praise. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.