

Desperate Prayer: Dependable Word (Evening Service)

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name, amen. Okay, well, good evening. I realize I didn't introduce myself. I'm Aaron, so I'm the minister that looks after the service. I'd love to meet you at the end of all of this. Come and say hi to me. Meet my family. It'll be lovely. So you heard the passage read, right? You heard it read? Pretty sweet. It's a great passage. This is a cracker, actually.

This is an absolute cracker, which in New Zealand means it's brilliant. But it is unusual. This is the second to last week we have in Proverbs, by the way. So let's just do like a sort of 10,000 feet sweep over Proverbs 30 to try and get our head around it, just remotely get our head around it. The first third of it, it'd be really helpful to have your Bibles open. The first third of it seems to be talking about this guy, Agar, who is sort of confessing, right? He's sort of talking about him, what's going on, how he's feeling, about God himself. And then the next third seems to be descriptions of arrogance or pictures of arrogance. Like we've got these children who are rejecting their parents and it doesn't end well for them. And then the last third, that's really perplexing. It's like Agar is just looking around and he's just making observations. And I know when it was read, it felt so random, right?

And some of it's quite hard to understand. And you'll notice I don't preach some of it because I don't understand it. But good chunks of it I think I get. So he makes these observations.

He's like, how about snakes? Have you guys seen those things? They've got no legs. How do they stay on the rocks? Have you guys ever thought about that? Or things like this.

Locusts. No one seems to be in charge of locusts. And yet they're really organized. Have you noticed that? So it's just a series of observations. This is the last third. It's just a series of observations. And it's not really obvious what the point is. They just seem to be observations for us to chew on and think them through. So that's most of the passage.

[2 : 38] And then right at the end, in summary, he says in verse 32, he goes, so yeah, so best if everyone just shut their mouth. So there you go. Proverbs 30. I'll say some more about it.

Let's get into it. Agar. We don't know anything about this guy, by the way. We have absolutely no idea who he is. He starts out by saying, I'm really weary. I'm so tired. And the basic gist of it is he's saying, I've tried to obtain wisdom. Like, I've tried to obtain knowledge and understanding. Those are the little triplet there right from chapter one. I've tried to obtain wisdom and knowledge and understanding. And I've got nowhere. I'm so stupid. It's like he needs a hug. But what's going on is this, is he's simply saying and quite passionately saying, I can't get wise through my own efforts. That's what he's saying. I cannot get wise through my own efforts. And he's modeling for us this idea that you can't really know anything until you admit you don't know anything. And he continues by saying, I don't know wisdom.

I haven't obtained wisdom. But God does. God knows wisdom. God's got wisdom. And that's where we get to verses four to six. That's kind of what that's about. That's the one that starts, he who has ascended to heaven and come down, who has gathered the wind with his fists. He's like, I can't gain wisdom through my own efforts, but I can know wisdom and I can flourish in this life if I know God. That's the gist of it. This God who he describes as wonderfully, so vividly, who can grasp the wind with his fists and he can gather the waters like a coat. And Agar says, you know, this is the Lord he's talking about here. I'm talking about the Lord.

And then he says, and he has a son. Do you see that in verse four? What is his name? The Lord. And he has a son. Surely you know. Surely you know who he's talking about. That's what he says there. Surely you know who I'm talking about. And this is where you go, it's Jesus. It's not Jesus.

Agar's not talking about Jesus here. He, let me remind you of the whole chunk. Who has wrapped up the garments? Who has wrapped up waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name? What is his son's name? Surely you know his name is the Lord and his son.

[5 : 13] It's you. He's talking about you. He's talking about Israel. He's talking about us. He's talking about the church. So Agar, what he's doing here is he's picking up this motif that's run through Proverbs. And the motif is about parents teaching wisdom to their children. So he's saying like a wise father, the Lord wants to teach his children wisdom, wants to give his children wisdom. God wants to show you wisdom. And then unsurprisingly, Agar starts talking about the Bible in verse five.

Agar says, I'm so weary of trying to find wisdom. I can't do it. But God has wisdom. God can give it to me. Now let me tell you about the Bible. It makes sense, right? So far. Verse five and six, every word of God proves true. He is a shield for those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and find you to be a liar. So what does God say about his word? It's pure and it's true. The Hebrew here has a sense of the true word is like a pure word. It's like like silver that's been refined and all the dross is taken out and it's polished up. That's the sense of that word true there. Every word of God is true. We can trust it. And there's no room for improvement. Don't add any words to it. It's complete. It's a canon. Don't add anything to it.

Satan in the Garden of Edith added one word. He added the word not. Surely you will not die. And he brought down humanity. So Agar highlights the quality of God's word. It's reliable. It's trustworthy. It's pure and it's complete. Don't mess with it. And also did you notice about that how God so closely aligns himself with his word? In verse five, I'll read it to you again because you didn't pick it up. Every word of God is true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

See the fluidity there between talking about God and his word? Every word, he is a shield. Take refuge in him. There's this fluid movement from word to God. It's drawing this parallel. And the point of the parallelism here is that God is really, really closely identified with every word in the Bible. There is very little separation between the two. So what's the big point so far? Agar despairs at his lack of wisdom. He knows that this wisdom can only come from God and God has made himself known to us through his word. That's the summary so far. See the secular perspective is this, is I can become successful and wise through my own efforts by just pulling up my bootstraps, by trying really, really, really, really hard. And Christians actually move in the opposite direction, don't they? They sort of move. It's like we have to be, it's like Agar saying we must be a little bit suspect about our own knowledge and our own ideas. And we must trust in God's wisdom, must desire his wisdom, must want it for ourselves.

We must want it to frame our world. And we do that by getting into his word. That's what it says so far. Now, what's the rest of the chapter about? Well, if the basic proposition of the text is this, so far, humbly come before God, acknowledging your lack of wisdom in order to know wisdom through his word, if that's the basic proposition, the rest of the chapter is a series of observations to support that basic proposition. And the way I think your observations are supposed to work is it shows us these pictures of, it tells us these stories, it gives us these pictures of arrogance or wisdom.

[9 : 05] wisdom. So that's what all the random stuff is, okay? It's pictures of arrogance or wisdom. Here is what it's like if you don't take Agar's advice. Here is what it's like if you do take Agar's advice. That's it. So let's have a look at a few of them. And some of them, like I said, I just had no idea. So I just stayed away from them. But the ones I had a bit of a, I could work out, let's talk about them. So verses, I'm not getting to the he goats. Absolutely no idea about the he goats.

So if you're a he goat person, I'm sorry. All right, 11 to 14. Agar says, how about those children that curse their parents? How about those guys? Have you seen people like that, he says.

This idea of disdaining and cursing your parents, it means, culturally what it meant, is that the children wanted their parents dead. They just really wanted their parents dead to get their money. And it talks about how that kind of greed and arrogance plays out in the life of these children. And it says these children develop like they have fangs. And they become so awful that they persecute the poor. And they just want more and more and more. And the thing is, they don't think they've done anything wrong. Verse 12, there are those who are clean in their own eyes, but are not washed of their filth. They're just thinking, yeah, this is how you do life. Just get as much as you can, man. Get as much as you can, any way you can. I'm doing great.

That's what they think. And Agur describes them as leeches. He says their life is just, give me, give me, give me. I want more. And then he says how that life looks long term.

[10:48] And it's ugly. It's verse 17. The eye that mocks a father this and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. It's just a picture of death. Then Agur goes on to make these really sort of, so this is a picture of arrogance here, okay?

If you don't take Agur's advice, this is what happens. This is what it looks like as an example. And then he goes on to make these kind of quite whimsical comments about the natural world. And it's just, it's fantastic stuff. 18 and 19. Three things are too wonderful for me. Four I do not understand. Don't get too hung up on that. That's just a literary device, okay? 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. The way of a man with a virgin. Okay, what is going on here? He's saying, I don't understand these things, but they're really great. How does the eagle stay up there? Like it's just, it's really up there. And I don't know how that works, you know? Boats on the sea. This is before people worked out about displacement and physics. It's like, have you seen those boats on the, how does that happen? How do they stay there, you know? And six, wow. That's just great stuff. Like, you know, fantastic. I don't understand this stuff, but it's wonderful. Now, here we go. It's not just random observations, okay? It is not random observations. What he's doing there is he's setting up verse 20. So remember verse 18, he says, these things are so wonderful. They're such wonderful things. Look, we prayed for June tonight that she would know the gift of wonder at God's works, right? What a wonderful thing to pray.

He's, he's, and this is exactly what Agur's doing here. He's the gift of wonder that comes with faith and belief in God. Now, these sort of feels like random observations here are setting up verse 20, which is this. This is the way of an adulteress. She eats and wipes her mouth and says, I have done no wrong. So in summary for this section, here's some really cool stuff that makes you wonder. And here's something really awful. And it's awful because there's no wonder.

For her, sex is like a meal. It's a snack on the run. It's, for her, this adulterous woman, it's, it's unremarkable. There's no wonder. There's no mystery. And there's no guilt. And there's no repentance. She's saying, I've done nothing wrong. And the author is saying, look at these amazing things. Look at this, look at this horrible thing that's happened here. And he's going, this is what the arrogant life produces. This is what the life of the fool looks like. It's a life outside of God's boundaries. And it's a life without meaning. It's a life without wonder. It's a life without the beauty, a mystery. Now, how Agur turns now and he shifts and he starts talking about things a bit more positively. So Agur has said, I'm so stupid. I've really tried to gain wisdom and knowledge and understanding. I can't do it, but God has it. He's going to give it to me because he's my heavenly father. I find it in his word. Now here's some pictures of arrogance. And now, here's some pictures of wisdom. Here's what it looks like when you take this path.

So Agur says things like this. He goes, have you seen the rock badger? No idea what that is, but have you seen one? Have you seen locusts and ants? They're just great, aren't they?

[14:33] The adulterous? Ah, the unwise life? Ah, look at that. But now let's look at the wise life. Verse 25. Ants are not people. Ants are a people not strong, but always have food. The ants, you know, they store food, so they always have food. Locusts have no king, but they're super organized. The lizard, they're nothing. Lizards are nothing. And hold them in your hand. But where do lizards live? They live in palaces. Not micro apartments, holes in the ground. They live in palaces. And Agur calls these, all these little creatures exceedingly wise.

So what is it that these things have going for them? It's not strength. It's not intelligence. They're not well connected. It's just wisdom. And they are killing it. They are flourishing.

They are doing so well because of wisdom. Folks, that's Proverbs 30 in a nutshell. And as we come to the end of Proverbs, you would have seen once again that it's taken us back to one of the major themes of Proverbs.

And that is this, that there are two paths in life. There's the path of wisdom and there is the path of foolishness and arrogance. And one way is life. And one way is spiritual death. And the question it brings before us is, what are we going to choose? One and two.

How do we stay on the path of life where there's meaning and there's wonder and there's flourishing? And Proverbs 30 gives us two action points. It gives us two action points here. The first one is we pray. And there is this fantastic model of prayer in verses seven to nine. This is the part, probably the only part of the passage that sort of jumps out. It's like, oh yeah, I think I remember

that. Here's the prayer of Agar.

[16 : 31] 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 a 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 the Lord. See, the goal of the prayer is to know God and not dishonor him. So the prayer here is this. It's give me what you want me to have, Lord. See, my big goal is knowing you. So don't put me in a situation where my heart will drift from you, because I'm too rich or I'm too poor, where my heart will drift from you onto just things. And Agar prays this kind of prayer because he knows his heart. He knows his own heart, as we should. He knows his heart is prone to drift.

He knows his own heart. He knows he desperately needs God. And it's a wonderfully humble and wise prayer. And we should adopt it for ourselves. So that's the first action point. The second action point is verse 32, right at the end there. Put your hand over your mouth. What's that about?

So you want to stay on the wise path? Put your hand over your mouth. So again, we're right at the end of Proverbs, and one of the last commands of Proverbs is just be quiet. What does it mean? I'll read the whole passage to you to remind you, okay? 32 and 33.

If you've been foolish exalting yourself, or if you've been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth. It's saying here, it's quite a challenge for us, actually. It's saying this. Where in your life are you being foolish? That's what it's saying. Where in your life are you foolish?

[18 : 30] Where in your life are you telling yourself the lie that you're the boss of everything? That you get to decide what's right and what's wrong? Where in your life are you believing the lie that, you know, if I just had this one thing, if I just had this one thing, everything would be okay.

And that thing could be sex, or it could be power, it could be money, it could be a certain job. If I just had this one thing, everything would be okay. And you start to tell yourself that, you start to tell yourself the lie, and then you start to think, okay, I'm willing to go outside God's boundaries to get that because I really, really want it, and I want it more than I want to honor God.

That's the path of foolishness. And Proverbs 30 very simply says this, you've got to tell yourself to shut up. You've got to tell yourself to be quiet. You've got to silence that voice and come to God and know his wisdom in that area of your life. And you've got to come to God in prayer and do that.

Now, I'd normally finish the message right here, but I think this is a good passage for us to create a little bit of space afterwards to reflect. So before we go to the intercessory prayers, I want us to stop for a few minutes and be in silence. Leah's going to come and play for us.

And we're going to sit, and we're going to ask the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name to speak to us. And during that time, I want you to ask yourself some tough questions, questions like this.

[20 : 06] Where is this self-deception in my heart? Lord Jesus, show that to me. Where am I deceiving myself? Where do I need to put my hand over my mouth and tell myself to stop telling myself these ridiculous lies that if I had a certain type of body or I had a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a child or this job, where are those lies in my heart? Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, help me put my hand over my mouth so I stop telling myself those lies. Where do I need God's wisdom in my life right now?

How do I stay on the path of wisdom? Let's take three or four minutes while Leah plays. And if you would like, if you know the person well beside you, perhaps you could ask them to pray for you if you want, or you could just sit in silence and just reflect on these questions.

And at the end of this time, the intercessory prayer is going to come up and pray for us. Gratuno.