

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Gospel Messages on "Little things": Little, but wise! Proverbs 30:24

*"There be four things that are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces."* Proverbs 30:24-28.

Today, we come to the last in our series of "Little Things" in the Bible. We have looked at a little town, Bethlehem; a little maid who waited on Naaman's wife; and a little Lamb, who is the Lord Jesus Christ as described in the book of Revelation. The scriptures we have just read this morning are the words of Agur from the Book of Proverbs. They are probably less familiar than those considered in the previous talks. Nevertheless, they contain some important lessons for us today.

Broadly speaking we learn that

- the ants teach us the necessity to **prepare**;
- the conies, or rock badgers, teach us the need for **protection**;
- the locusts teach us the secret of **power**; and
- the spiders or, possibly, geckoes teach us to grasp the **promises of God**.

### The ants teach us the necessity to prepare

Let's first consider the ant and the need to prepare. There are about eight thousand kinds of ants found throughout the world. Many different ants are found in Israel, but the context of our passage identifies this one as the harvester or agricultural ant. It collects many varieties of seeds, especially those of grasses, during early summer. It often removes the husks and allows them to blow away in the wind. The piles of resulting debris are one way in which its colonies may be discovered. It then stores these seeds in underground galleries. Interestingly, some of the workers of the colony are fed so well that their abdomen swells to the size of a pea and they serve as barrels of liquid food that others can tap. We also know that some ants use "herds" of greenfly in a similar way. When the ants stroke the greenfly with their feelers a droplet of sweet "honey-dew" is excreted.

The ant is twice mentioned in the book of Proverbs. In chapter 6, it is presented as a pattern of industry: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest." In the second passage, that which we read previously, she is presented specifically as a model of wisdom. However, both scriptures reveal that the ant prepares in the fruitful times (summer) for the times of dearth (winter). There is a very solemn warning to the non-Christian here: "Prepare to meet thy God!"

In Acts 17:22-31, the apostle Paul was passing through the city of Athens and found an altar inscribed: "To the unknown God". He then speaks to the people about this God describing Him as follows:

- the Maker of the world and all in it;
- the Lord of heaven and earth who does not dwell in humanly constructed temples;
- the Source of life who needs nothing from men and upon whom men depend for their very existence whether they like it or not;
- the Creator who has made all people of one blood;
- The Surveyor who has measured nation's dwellings and set their boundaries;
- the Timekeeper who has determined people's seasons and times;
- the Righteous and Loving One who cannot be represented by images sculpted by the hands of men.

At the end of this description, Paul states that it is this God who commands all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained. He identifies this judge as the One whom He has raised from the dead - even His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, we know from other scriptures that all judgement has been given to the Son. In John 5:21-23 we read: *"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son that all should honour the Son as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him."*

We get a description of Christ as Judge in Revelation 1. There His robe expresses the dignity of His office. The golden girdle about His breasts shows that the glory of God is the motive for His judgement. His white hair proclaims His wisdom, while His flaming eyes show true discernment. His feet of white hot brass speak of the glory of divine righteousness towards mankind and His voice sounding like many waters expresses the power of His authority. His mouth wields a sharp, two edged sword which represents the Word of God, and His personal glory is seen in the metaphor of the sun shining in its strength. This is the Son of God as a judge.

We know too that it has been once appointed that men die, but that the judgement follows. Death is the separation of man's spirit, soul and body. The body may well return to dust in some way, the spirit goes back to God who gave it, while the soul goes, in a conscious state, into the unseen world. For the unbeliever, this means the torments of Hades until the day of resurrection. In Luke 16:19-31 we read of two men. One was a poor beggar called Lazarus. His soul went into Abraham's bosom - the place for the faithful Jew. The other was a rich man, an unbeliever, who was dead and buried yet was found "in torments in Hades". He cried out for his tongue to be cooled by a drop of water. It was not permitted. Neither was he allowed to pass from torments to the place of comfort. Furthermore, he was not permitted to return to his family to warn them about the torments of Hades. Instead, he was told that they wouldn't believe even if one rose from the dead. His family had Moses and the prophets - that should be enough. This may sound quite terrifying, but they are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who, as God, knows all things. Sadly, people comfort themselves at the death of a loved one by saying, "He's at peace now." Sadly, for the unbelieving, that is not the teaching of scripture.

After the thousand years reign of Christ on earth, the Son will hand everything back to God. The bodies of the dead unbelievers are raised in another form and their souls re-united with them. They all stand before the Great White throne where they are righteously judged and then cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, otherwise called Hell - a place of separation, torment and ruin. It is the same destiny that faces the devil and the angels who have rebelled against God.

So, the first action in preparing to meet your God is one of **repentance**. This is a complete change of mind. It requires a judgement of your own sinful life which is in rebellion against God and makes you a child of the devil. Repentance is a result of God's word acting upon you in the power of His Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. Christ said, *"Of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged."* (John 16:8-11)

In John 3:1-8, Jesus describes how a man is born again by the convicting application of the Word of God (water) by the power of the Spirit to that man's heart.

As for those who are born again, they are directed to Christ by that same Spirit. We read of those who were born of God in John 1:10-13. *"He (Christ) was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto his own, and His own received him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* They were not born of human descent, nor by human design, nor by human desire. They were born of the Spirit, according to the nature of God and by the will of God. Children of God rather than children of the devil.

The conies teach us the need for **Protection**.

The Coney is about the size of a rabbit. It has a round head, short round ears and a very short tail. It is clothed with fine, soft, tawny fur with a single pale spot in the middle of its back. The four toes on each of its forefeet have tiny hooves - as do the three toes of each hind foot. It lives in holes between rocks. Where a group of conies is found feeding, sentries are found on guard. One shriek from these sends them all racing to the rocks for refuge. If the sinner wishes to be sheltered from the judgement of God, she or he must run, not to the rocks, but to the Rock of God's providing.

This is also what the verse read previously tells us to do. We must **receive** the Lord Jesus Christ. We may say, "What does this mean?" The scripture explains itself - by **believing** in His name. That is to say, you are to put your full trust in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

But you may ask why must it be through Christ? In turn, it may be asked of you, "In what other way other than the sacrifice of Christ has God dealt with the question of people's sinfulness?" The hymn writer, Albert Midlane, wrote:

*The perfect righteousness of God  
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood,  
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace  
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.*

*God could not pass the sinner by,  
His sin demands that he should die;  
But in the cross of Christ we see  
How God can save, yet righteous be.*

Let us remember that, in His nature, God is both love and light. This means that He is gracious, but also holy. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. If God is to forgive sin then it must be on a righteous basis. The death of the Just One for the unjust is the righteous ground upon which God is able to forgive. 1 Peter 3:18 states: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit." In this verse we first see the sinless Christ as the sin offering - answering to the claims of God upon mankind. He is the One who took God's judgement against sin. Secondly, we see Him as our substitute - the One who took God's judgement on our behalf, instead of us. As the hymn of Midlane continues:

*The judgement fell on Jesus' head,  
'Twas in His blood sin's debt was paid;  
Stern Justice can demand no more,  
And Mercy can dispense her store.*

Finally, we see Him as the One who has reconciled us to God. That is, whereas we were enemies of God, He is now able to make us God's allies. This is indicated in the last verse of Midlane's hymn:

*The sinner who believes is free,  
Can say, "The Saviour died for me:"  
Can point to the atoning blood  
And say, "This made my peace with God."*

Just as the conies run to the rocks at the first sign of danger, so the sinner must run to the Rock of Ages - the Lord Jesus Christ - if she or he wants to be safe from God's judgement. Augustus Toplady knew this truth and was inspired to write those precious words:

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.  
Let the water and the blood  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure -  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

### **The locusts teach us the secret of Power**

The Hebrew word for "locust" is "arbeh" which, in turn comes from a root word that means to "multiply". In the plague which came upon Egypt in Moses' day, the locusts covered the earth so that the ground could not be seen and they stripped the land of all its vegetation.

It is the fact that they have no king, yet move about in bands, that the writer in Proverbs commends as wise. It reminds us today that our Lord, Jesus Christ, has ascended to heaven. There He sits at the right hand of the majesty on high. Yet, His church remains on earth as a living witness to Him. Everyone who has confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God is a member of that church. Its secret power lies in the fact that its members band together.

The overall unity of the church is seen in the names used for it in the scriptures. It is the flock of Christ. It is the body of Christ. It is the house of God. It is the bride of Christ. It is the assembly of called out ones. Every member is cemented into this mighty assembly by the Holy Spirit - a bond that cannot be broken. This must be remembered in a day when the responsible Christian churches have compromised the truth of Scripture and, thus, have failed in their responsibility Godward. As a consequence, we have the many denominations of Christendom - a name given to a system formed by all those who profess the name of Christ but, sadly, including many who do not really know Him as Lord and Saviour at all.

Sometimes we hear people saying, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian." This is true; but you can't be a *faithful* Christian unless you do assemble together with fellow believers. God commands us not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together, especially as the coming of the Lord draws closer (Hebrews 10:25). There is strength in numbers. If you are a nomadic Christian flitting from one church to another, then you are simply a person who will be unable to exercise the gifts that God has given you effectively.

Do I hear you say, "Which church is the right church?" The book of first Thessalonians gives some guidance here. In the chapter 1, we find that this church was commended for its work of faith, its labour of love and its patience of hope. They lived out Christ in their lives so much that they were examples to all who met them. That is to say, they practised what they preached. The word of the Lord sounded out from them. They knew that the scriptures were the inspired word of God. They preached it. Never would they say that the Bible was full of myths, or legends or fables. They were marked by faith and this would have been reflected in their love one for another - a real, practical love. They had rejected all idolatry and chose to serve the one true God. Denominations which tolerate idolatry of any kind should be avoided because Christians worship the Father in spirit and in truth. In other words, they do not need any form of artefact to prompt or promote their worship, but they do need to be steeped in God's Word. Neither do they need any special building in which to worship. This they may do at any time and in any place from sincere hearts. They lived in expectation of the coming of God's Son recognising Him as their deliverer from the wrath to come - whatever form it may take.

So, if you are seeking a group of believers with whom you can gather and take on responsibility, then look for one which is Bible-studying and Bible-believing, is marked by love, witnesses faithfully to Christ, recognises the unity of the body of Christ, worships simply according to revealed truth and looks for the coming of the Lord. Other scriptures tell us that such groups of Christians follow apostolic doctrine, meet for prayer and have a regular meeting to remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. Among them, two or even more elders may be identified. They have both a shepherd and bishop character - that is to say, they take responsibility for the spiritual and emotional welfare of the group (1 Peter 5). This they do in love. Deacons are also found among them (1 Timothy 3). They take responsibility in the more practical matters relating to the church. An assembly of Christians run according to biblical order is a force for good in this world ever bringing glory to the name of God.

### **In the spider we see how we can grasp the Promises of God**

Finally, in the spider we see how we can grasp the Promises of God. The Hebrew word for spider is "semamith" and may actually refer to the gecko (a lizard which is able to cling on to surfaces even when inverted). Whichever is actually referred to, we can see that it is able to grasp hold and is found in kings' palaces. We are able to take God at His word. 2 Peter 1:4 speaks of the promises of God being exceedingly great and precious. Christians have been called to grasp hold of these in order that they may be partakers of the divine nature by which they may live godly lives. If we are believers in the Son of God, then we have the promise of an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). It is an inheritance that will never be corrupted or fade away. It will be an eternal joy. But there's more! The Christian is promised a new body - one like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus. In first Corinthians 15, it is described as a glorious body, a spiritual body, a heavenly body, an incorruptible body, a powerful body and an immortal body. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded by John to have said, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there you may be also*" (John 14:2 and 3)

The Son of God went to the cross, into the grave, rose again and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us in that marvellous realm above - in the house where love, light, life, peace, praise and joy will always reign. The hymn writer JG Deck expressed the thought this way:

*High in the Father's house above,  
Our mansion is prepared;  
There is the home, the rest we love,  
And there our bright reward.*

*With Him we love, in spotless white,  
In glory we shall shine;  
His blissful presence our delight,  
In love and joy divine.*

*All taint of sin shall be removed,  
All evil done away;  
And we shall dwell with God's Beloved,  
Through God's eternal day.*

Let us hold fast to the promises of God and we will be found in the palace of the Eternal King for evermore!

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