

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Four things little and wise: The coney - Refuge in the Rock

Good morning. Today, we come to the second of our talks on "Four things little and wise", as found in Proverbs 30:24-28. In Proverbs 30:26, reference is made to the Coney or the Rock Badger. Some Bible translations have the Syrian Hyrax. Let us read all these verses to refresh our minds as to the subject and the setting. *"There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer; the rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags; the locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; the spider skilfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings' palaces."*

The King James (Authorised) Version is a little misleading as it refers to this animal as a coney, another word for rabbit. For the sake of clarity during this talk I will use the term "rock badger". A rock badger is similar to a rabbit in size and possibly physical appearance. However, it has a few differences such as shorter ears, does not dig burrows, feet are not suitable for digging and, although it appears to chew the cud, it does not actually do so.

The writer of Proverbs 30 uses a number of illustrations from nature and life to present simple teaching that all can understand. Last week, the talk was on the ant and making preparation to meet God. This second illustration re-emphasises the previous message in Proverbs 30:25 and provides further instruction. This is summarised in today's title, "Refuge in the Rock".

Of the four things termed "little", the rock badger is the largest. This does not necessarily imply greatness, strength, power, etc. compared to the other three creatures. Individually all four creatures are vulnerable in one or more areas of life. Apart from the spider, the other three rely upon living in communal groups of large families. The rock badger group can vary between 10 and 80. It has been observed that the rock badger employs lookouts while the group forages or rests. The lookout would sound an alarm when danger threatens and then there would be a scramble for safety among the rocks and crags.

What therefore can we learn from this small creature?

Let us consider the word "little"

In Matthew 19:13-15, we have an incident which tells us something about being little. Let us read Matthew 19:13-15, *"Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' And He laid His hands on them and departed from there."*

From Matthew 19:13-15 we learn the following: little children are often considered as being unimportant and possibly a nuisance by some adults. This was even true with regard to the disciples who intended to dismiss the parents, possibly the mothers, and the children as being unimportant to the Lord Jesus. However, we find that it was just the opposite as far as the Lord Jesus was concerned. He considered the children as being important and in so doing encouraged the parents to bring their children to Him. This, in itself, was a lesson to the disciples that no one is unimportant to the Lord Jesus, regardless of their status in society.

Children are not a nuisance but a blessing. This is a theme through Scripture which we all need to take account. When there are children in the home parents have increased responsibility. Children are vulnerable and need to be cared for. If God has given you children, then while they are in your care you need to ensure that they are given every help that is necessary for their wellbeing. For Christian parents, this includes introducing them to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour. That is why 'Sunday School' and other youth work is very important in laying down a good scriptural knowledge of the word of God in the hearts and minds of children. We suffer in society today because there is not enough care given to children. Children need a loving, safe and caring environment, centred on the home, in which they can grow to adulthood. How often we hear on the news about neglect and abuse of children, which sometimes leads to their untimely death. This is a sad reflection on society. Years ago it was often stated in debates on radio and television that society was improving, one of the side benefits of those who believed in evolution and the gradual improvement of mankind. We hear less of this today as the evidence all around us is demonstrating the opposite!

John in his first epistle refers to some fellow believers as "little children" within the Christian family. Little children would be those who are young and new in the Christian faith. Dear listener, after this talk you might like to read 1 John 2:18-27. These verses provide both guidance, in order to distinguish between truth and error, and encouragement through the divine help of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in each believer. Just as young children in a family need to be lovingly looked after, so do the young in the faith Christians in our various fellowships.

Paul, in his many epistles, often encouraged new Christians. Galatians 4:19 is an example of his deep and intense care for them, *"My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you."* Reading through the Epistle to the Galatians, you will see how many problems were bothering these believers. Paul takes it very personally, *"My little children..."* and this gives us a deep impression of how he cared for them. For Paul, it was as agonising as giving birth to a child. Paul's intention was to have the

spiritual features of Christ formed in their lives, so that they would be able to resist wrong teaching and become strong in the Christian faith.

Let us consider the word "wise"

We need to be careful about wisdom or being wise. There are two sources of wisdom, one coming from man's intellect and the other which has its origin in God. Satan in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7) misled Eve and she thought that the forbidden fruit would make her wise (Genesis 3:5-6). Breaking God's command ended in disaster for Adam, Eve and the whole human race, see Genesis 3:6. This is supported by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19, "*The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"

In contrast to the above, we read in Proverbs 9:10, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*" A correct understanding of who God is and a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour will bring a person into the right attitude of mind. It is in this way that we learn wisdom, not through our own ideas but as guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Paul writing to Timothy in his first epistle, 1 Timothy 1:17, provides us with a clear statement as to where true wisdom comes from, "*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.*" Further to that statement Paul gives encouragement in 2 Timothy 3:15, "*And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" This was how Timothy gained salvation and it is the only source of wisdom for people today. This is not only the initial faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins but it also involves all aspects of our salvation. Daily Christian living needs the wisdom that comes through knowing the Scriptures.

This is reinforced by the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as found in Matthew 7:24-27, "*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*"

In Matthew 7:24-27 we have all the necessary ingredients for a safe life: hear the sayings of the Lord Jesus and be obedient to them. This is like a person building a house on good firm foundations - a rock. The opposite is also true and is found in the second part of Matthew 7:24-27. If you hear but ignore the words of the Lord Jesus it is like building a house on sand - no foundation. When the time of testing comes, the rain and flood water, the house on the rock stands firm, whereas the house on the sand has its foundation washed away and the house collapses.

The Rock Badger

Let us turn now to consider the subject of our talk and read again Proverbs 30:26, "*The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags.*" Proverbs 30:26 is the only occasion where this Hebrew word is translated 'feeble' and therefore it might imply weakness. On all other occasions, the word is translated as 'strong', 'mighty' or similar. I think possibly the word 'feeble' gives a slightly incorrect impression about these animals. What is true about the rock badger, is that the creature is not aggressive and is inclined to run for shelter when danger threatens. The other feature that marks this creature is the place where it shelters, the crags. They make their home in the crags; they use rocky places for shelter and safety.

In some ways, I am reminded of the Scripture which describes Moses in the following terms in Numbers 12:3: "*Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*" (King James Version). It is often said in relation to Moses that 'meekness' was not 'weakness'. Even a superficial study of Moses would support such a statement. Additionally, one of the blessings found in Matthew 5:5 states, "*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*" (King James Version). Being meek is a positive spiritual feature of a believer's character and in some way is the opposite of an arrogant and ill-mannered person. In addition, we only need to consider how the Lord Jesus described Himself in Matthew 11:29: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*" (King James Version). If being 'meek' was a worthwhile feature of the Lord's character, then there is no way we can describe the Lord as weak! What did our Lord Jesus Christ do? He left heaven's glory, became a man and lived a totally sinless life in this world. He journeyed to the cross and became the offering for sin. But that offering satisfied a holy God. Through death and resurrection, Christ defeated death and in so doing defeated Satan. Finally, the Lord Jesus rose from the grave and ascended back to glory and the result of this great achievement was and is a great salvation. This salvation is available to all but only of benefit to those who repent and put their faith and trust in the Lord.

True Christians are often viewed as weak people, not standing up for, or demanding, their rights. This attitude is in line with God's word, we are expected to 'turn the other cheek' and leave any injustice to be resolved by the Lord Jesus in His own time. As Paul teaches in Romans 12:19, "*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.*"

In the same way as the rock badgers make their home in the lofty crags and rocks for safety, we find a parallel for believers. A favourite Scripture of mine is Psalm 61. We find in Psalm 61:2-3 the following, "*From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.*"

From Psalm 61:2-3 we can see how the natural instinct of the rock badger aligns with the believer. When danger threatens, then it is to "*the rock that is higher than I*" (Psalm 61:2) that the believer turns. Why? Because it is there that shelter and safety are found, not in our own strength or ability but in the resources of the 'Mighty God', our Lord Jesus Christ. The rock is a strong tower or fortress to protect from the enemy who may be seeking to damage and destroy. A supporting verse of Scripture is found in

Psalm 18:2, *"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*

In the above and other Scriptures, we see in the figure of the Rock a picture of Christ. This is clearly brought to our attention in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness."* In this Scripture the teaching of the literal journey of Israel in the wilderness is considered spiritually to highlight the provision that God intended for Israel and what is intended for us. The manna and the water were the result of divine provision. The rock in the wilderness symbolised Christ and that true refreshment can only come from Him. In spiritual terms, Christ went with them through the wilderness even though many complained and sinned, despite the evidence of God's power, deliverance, preservation and longsuffering with such a fickle people. It is the same for us; food and water are the symbols of spiritual refreshment that we need from Christ. It is in the Scriptures that we find this refreshment.

The wisdom of the rock badger, always knowing where to go for protection, speaks to us that in our lives we too need to know where our safety and protection can be found - in Christ alone. As we feast on the spiritual food we are strengthened for the tasks of each day. Believers who rarely read the word of God may fail to grow spiritually.

A hymn by VJ Charlesworth (1839-1915) is most appropriate at this point.

*The Lord's our Rock, in Him we hide:
A shelter in the time of storm!
Secure whatever ill betide:
A shelter in the time of storm!*

*Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land!
A weary land, a weary land;
Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land!
A shelter in the time of storm!*

*A shade by day, defence by night:
A shelter in the time of storm!
No fears alarm, no foes affright:
A shelter in the time of storm!*

*The raging storms may round us beat:
A shelter in the time of storm!
We'll never leave our safe retreat,
A shelter in the time of storm!*

*O Rock divine, O Refuge dear:
A shelter in the time of storm!
Be Thou our helper ever near,
A shelter in the time of storm!*

Conclusion

As we draw to a close on our radio talk this morning, let us challenge ourselves to live out our Christian life guided by wisdom that comes from above. Wisdom is needed in all areas of life.

We need to recognise that there are hidden forces at work in the world today. Much of the activity is anti-God and is therefore anti-Christian. We may not always recognise our enemy or his activity, but it is there nevertheless.

So it is important we understand our own frailty but, at the same time, that we know that we have a great source of strength found in our God - the one who is our Rock and fortress.

We are not to model ourselves on the great and fashionable people of the world even though some might be believers. We are to model ourselves on Christ as He is the great example to follow.

In Luke 7:31-35, the Lord Jesus summarises the people of the world and how believers should respond. Let us read Luke 7:31-35, *"And the Lord said, 'To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not weep." For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But wisdom is justified by all her children.'"*

The Lord Jesus said that He came to the people in two ways, with joy and with sadness but there was no response to either. This approach was illustrated by John the Baptist and by Himself and in each case they were both rejected. But the Lord Jesus concludes that both approaches were marked by wisdom and wisdom is exalted in her own. It is very likely that in whatever way

you approach and reach out to other people the reaction might be similar to the above. But what is important at all times and even when rebuffed, is to be guided by wisdom from above. Harry A Ironside makes a comment on the phrase, "*wisdom is justified by all her children*", (Luke 7:35) as follows, "In the wisdom of God there is a time to stress the importance of repentance; there is also a time to stress the preciousness of the grace of God, and He will be glorified in both messages and in whatever servants He uses to give them forth."

It is our responsibility to be wise but only in the strength that God gives. I will close by paraphrasing Proverbs 30:25, the verse under consideration, "*The people of God are a feeble folk, yet they make their home on the Rock that is Christ.*"

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you this day.

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