

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Four things little and wise: The locust - Going in bands, fellowship

Today we come to the third of our talks in our present series 'Four things little and wise' from Proverbs 30:24-28. As it is such a short passage, let me read it to you. *"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king's palaces."* What an interesting few verses towards the end of Proverbs, the 'book of wisdom' written by Solomon, although these words are attributed to Agur (see Proverbs 30:1).

Four things, little upon the earth, but exceedingly wise. How good to see that God takes account of the little things in His creation, and through their exceeding wisdom He wants us to learn lessons. You'll no doubt be familiar with the expression, "That a picture is worth a thousand words", and here we have these little creatures brought before us as object lessons. In the first talk we looked at the ant and noted its preparation. In the second talk we considered the coney and saw how it took refuge in the rocks. Our subject today is the locust, going forth in bands with the thought of fellowship. Next week, DV, we will be thinking about the spider and what it can teach us.

What an encouragement to see that the Mighty God often takes up the small, insignificant things or persons to accomplish His will. We could think of Naaman's little maid and how her words were the means of blessing to her master (see 2 Kings 5:1-19); or the lad who gave up his packed lunch (of five barley loaves and two small fishes) so that the Lord Jesus could feed the five thousand (see John 6:1-14); or the poor widow who cast her two mites into the treasury (see Luke 21:1-4) and the value the Lord Jesus Christ put on that selfless act! We should never despise little things. I can remember my grandfather often saying, "Little is much when God is in it", and so it is!

Well, the locust is *"little upon the earth"*, but let us think about it for a moment. Locusts are the swarming phase of certain species of short-horned grasshoppers. In small numbers they don't cause any problems, but under certain environmental conditions they can breed quickly and become swarms. They form bands and because they are strong flyers they can travel great distances. When the swarm settles, usually on green vegetation, they can devastate crops often causing famine and human migration. In Exodus 10:4 we get the first mention of locusts in the Bible. Locusts were one of the ten plagues which God sent upon the Egyptians so that Pharaoh might let the children of Israel leave Egypt to go into the 'promised land'. Apart from the verses under consideration, Proverbs 30:24-28, they are only mentioned in the Bible in a negative, destructive way. That is apart from the references in Mathew and Mark's Gospels to the fact that John the Baptist ate them with wild honey (Matthew 3:4, Mark 1:6). The Jews had dietary restrictions given to them by God, but in Leviticus 11:22 we read that they were permitted to eat locusts. In fact, they appear to have been eaten throughout history and apparently are considered a delicacy in many countries.

So why are the locusts mentioned in this verse? Certainly they are little, and on their own quite insignificant but in numbers they are mighty! They know where their strength lies, in forming bands, and without a king, they go forth 'in ranks'. I understand this to be a military term and it conveys the idea of organisation and discipline. Proverbs 30:27 says that they are "exceedingly wise", in their collective behaviour. In our talk today I want to focus on the collective aspect of Christianity - which is fellowship.

In the beginning God said that it was not good that the man should be alone, so woman was made for him, to be his suitable helper (see Genesis 2:18). Adam called his wife Eve (which means the mother of all living) and they had family together. However far we may have moved away from this God-given pattern in our modern society, let us remind ourselves that "from the beginning it was not so." God sets us all in relationships - in families, and peoples and nations and it is sad when any of these break down. It is vital to understand that sin came into the world as a direct result of man's disobedience (see Romans 5:12, 16 and Genesis 3:1-7). This spoiled the communion (or fellowship) which Adam and Eve had with God (see Genesis 3:24), and it was only a matter of time before further results of sin would be seen in the first two brothers, Cain and Abel (see Genesis 4:1-15). The sin which had brought a separation between man and God would now separate man from man, and we read Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8).

Through the death of Christ upon the cross, we who have trusted in Him have been brought into a relationship with God and to our fellow believers - our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you read in Ephesians 2:11-18, you'll see that

as unbelieving Gentiles we really had no former relationship with, or claim upon, God. As the Creator, He has a claim upon us but outside of Israel, our natural position was hopeless, and we were without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). And so it is with great joy we read Ephesians 2:13 which says, *“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”*

Unlike the Gentiles, the Jews had a history with God. They are God’s chosen people and He loves them in a special way. The Old Testament part of our Bible tells the story of God’s dealings with the nation of Israel and their relationship with Him. Sadly this was often marked by unbelief and idolatry and God’s love often had to give way to His judgement. Today the nation of Israel is in a state of unbelief. Although God gave them the Old Testament Scriptures, they failed to recognise Jesus Christ as their promised Messiah. It is true that the Romans crucified Christ, but the cry of the Lord’s own people (the Jews) was, *“Away with him, away with him, crucify him”* (see John 19:14-15). Returning to Ephesians 2:14-18 we see that in Christ both Jew and Gentile can be reconciled to God and also to each other. The Church of God is composed of both Jews and Gentiles who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

The blessing of salvation is *“unto all and upon all them that believe”* (as we read in Romans 3:22) and with that salvation comes forgiveness, justification, reconciliation and many more blessings besides. Through the shed blood of our Saviour on Calvary we can know that our sins are forgiven and God has declared us to be right (for that is what justified means). We are also reconciled to God, as the distance which was caused by sin, has now been removed through the death of Christ. The hymn writer was in the good of this when he wrote:

*We boast in Thee, Thou Source of good,
Thy glory fills our sight,
Now reconciled through Jesus’ death,
We praise with great delight.*

EC Rubie (1846-1942)

And so for the remaining time we have today I want to look at the blessings and responsibilities we have as being in fellowship with God and with the saints (or people) of God. I suppose it is necessary to clarify that when the Bible says that we are saints, the idea is that we are the ‘set apart’ or ‘holy ones’ of God’s choosing. Every Christian is therefore a saint of God, despite what some church traditions would teach to the contrary.

Fellowship (or communion) can be experienced on many levels, whether it be in social or business circles, but the fellowship we have been brought into as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ is surely the loftiest of all! The Apostle John writes in his first epistle, *“And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ”* (see 1 John 1:3). What an incredible thought that we have been brought into such a position, through grace, that we have a common partaking with the Father and the Son! The Holy Spirit too, indwelling our hearts makes these things a present reality and that which should affect our everyday lives in a profound way. As partakers of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4) there should be a demonstration in our lives of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (see 2 Peter 1:5-7). What an example we have in Peter, as to how our lives should be changed by the indwelling Spirit of God. In the Gospels, we find Peter often acting in self-will and his failures are well known, but now as he writes his epistles some thirty years later we find him fulfilling his Christ given commission, *“Shepherd my sheep”* (see John 21:16, JN Darby Translation).

Before we consider the fellowship (or communion) of saints which is the main consideration of our talk, let us take a moment to consider what it is to have fellowship with Divine Persons. God has progressively revealed Himself to man throughout history, Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that. *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”* (Authorised Version), or *“in the person of the Son”* (JN Darby Translation). In Christ, we have a full revelation of the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In John’s Gospel from John 13-16 inclusive, we have the teachings of Jesus prior to His crucifixion. These chapters are known as the ‘upper room ministry’ and it is here that we find much of the teaching in relation to the Christian position now that Christ is in heaven and the Holy Spirit is on earth. The Son declared the Father in every word and action and brought glory to Him in all that He was on earth. Now the Holy Spirit is come into the world (as a consequence of Christ being ascended) and He takes the role of comforter and teacher, and it is He Who abides in us for ever. In John 14:23, we have the promise that the Father and Son will abide in those who love Christ.

And so there should be a visible evidence of this fellowship with Divine Persons. ‘God is Light’ and He is ‘in the light’, that is, He has been manifested - or made known (see 1 John 1), and our fellowship (or communion) with Him must be marked by holiness. Paul asks the Christians at Corinth, *“What communion hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14) and the answer of course is none! As Christians, we should be marked by the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23) and in the energy of the indwelling Spirit the fruit of our lips should be the sacrifice of praise to God (see Hebrews 13:15-16). Jesus said in John 4:23, that *“The Father seeketh worshippers”* and this is our present

privilege as believer priests. How the Father delights to hear our expressions of appreciation of the One who fills His heart! How amazing that we can have shared thoughts with the Father concerning His Son. The hymn writer had a sense of this as he or she wrote:

*He preciousness itself to Thee,
To us is precious too,
We every beauty in Him see,
And Thine own glory view.*

Anonymous

How wonderful it is when the condition of our heart is in accord with the position into which God's matchless grace has brought us. It should be our daily concern that our state (our present spiritual condition) should be equal to our standing (that which God has made us in Christ).

God's will for us is that we should enjoy fellowship with other Christians. In Acts 2:41-42 we read, *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* This is the Scriptural pattern for us who have been saved by believing the Gospel. We should be baptised in accordance with Scripture, and then continue steadfastly in these things which marked the early church - the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread and in prayers. You will notice that the doctrine of the apostles is linked to the fellowship. This is very important if we want our fellowship together to be approved of God. As we come together in assembly as the people of God, we need to be in obedience to the Word of God, not quenching the Spirit of God. In our day, which is doubtless at the end of the church's history in the world, this needs to be emphasised. It's not our church, it's the church of the living God and what takes place as Christians meet together must be in accordance with His Word. The prophet Amos asked the question, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3) and the answer is, "Of course not." So our fellowship (or communion) together as the people of God must be in subjection to the doctrine of the apostles.

Our fellowship together is founded upon the blood of Christ. Paul in writing to the saints at Corinth gives us helpful instruction as to the Lord's Table as well as the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 10-11). I don't think these are synonymous terms. We partake of the Supper once a week, (on the Lord's Day) but we are partakers of the Lord's Table, that is, in fellowship with Him all the time. Perhaps I should ask you directly if you do partake of the Lord's Supper each week? In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul repeats what he had received from the glorified Lord, which was just as on the night in which He was betrayed, *"This do in remembrance of me"*, and by inspiration adds, *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [or announce] the Lord's death till he come."* Only bread, but it symbolises the body of Christ, only wine but it symbolises His shed blood. In an unbelieving world, what a privilege to be able to 'announce' the Lord's death week by week, until He returns to rapture us to glory!

In Scripture, the table is often a symbol of fellowship and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1-13) and Lazarus (John 12:2) readily come to mind as examples of those who sat at the table and enjoyed fellowship. You will notice when Paul appeals to the Christians at Corinth in relation to fellowship at the Lord's Table, that he reverses the order of the elements. *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"* (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-22). Our partaking at the Table of the Lord demands that we be separate from evil things. Paul uses a strong term, *"the table of devils [or demons]"* (1 Corinthians 10:21) to warn us of the danger of 'going along' with evil. The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins (see 1 John 1:7) and brings us into Christian fellowship - truly a cup of blessing! The bread as well as symbolising Christ's physical body would speak of the truth of all believers composing the mystical body of Christ on earth, with Christ as the risen head in heaven.

So as we partake week by week of the Lord's Supper in memory of His death, and in view of His soon return, let us also consider that our partaking of the elements gives expression to the fellowship of saints. Let us examine ourselves to ensure that we partake in a worthy manner (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-34). The ground of Christian fellowship is that we gather together to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and on the doctrine of the 'one body'. Every blood bought child of God has their place in the body of Christ. There is no need for membership lists; the Apostle Paul writes, *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another"* (see Romans 12:5). There is no need either for seeking to unite churches together; again Paul writes, *"There is one body..."* and our obligation is to *"Walk worthy ... endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:1, 3)

Returning to our verse for a moment, *"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands"* (Proverbs 30:27), we see in their collective behaviour a valuable lesson for us as Christians. We are spiritually stronger and healthier when we are in practical fellowship with the people of God. We need to continue steadfastly in

fellowship together, "in bands." And so it is good when the fellowship we have been brought into positionally is seen to be worked out practically. This will be seen in a number of different ways in our interaction with each other.

We've thought about our meeting together, under the authority of God's word and the expression of that fellowship in the Lord's Supper but what about prayer? We need to continue steadfastly in prayer. I'm sure every Christian values personal prayer and the access we have to the throne of grace but what about collective prayer? Do we value the prayer meeting? Are we always there? I count it a great privilege to be able to meet with fellow believers and have fellowship in prayer. I'm not speaking about repeating set prayers together, but rather adding my personal 'Amen' to the audible prayers of the brothers at the meeting.

In Philippians 1:5, Paul speaks about "*fellowship in the gospel*" and in 2 Corinthians 8:4, we read of "*fellowship of the ministering to the saints*" (which means putting our hand in our pocket). With so much spiritual and material need amongst the people of God and many known to us, it is a test of true fellowship if we are marked by steadfast prayer and cheerful giving. The Scripture says, "*But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*" (see Hebrews 13:16).

May God bless you all.

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