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Proverbs 30:24-28 "Make Us Wise, Lord" December 16, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Proverbs Chapter 30 verse 24.

The purpose of the poetic books, of which this is a part, is to draw us closer to the Lord on a daily basis, so everything that is written in these poetic books are intended to be applied in the present tense, and they're written that way.

Most of the book of Proverbs is written by Solomon, or is either his proverbs or the ones that he liked. The last couple of chapters are not. Chapter 30 is written by a fellow named Agur, and then Chapter 31 we will see in a couple weeks written by a fellow named Lemuel.

But this morning I wanted to just take us to verse 24 down through verse 28. We don't know much about Agur. Agur means gatherer. He's certainly an example of the fact that God uses people that we don't know. You don't have to be famous for the Lord to use you. We don't know anything about this man. We know that he was a humble guy. In the first couple of verses of this proverb, this chapter, he talks about the fact that, his learning capacity wasn't great. He didn't boast about having some special insight. He talked about his limitations and the fact that he was, that he felt sometimes inferior to men that were more learned than he. But he really believed, like God has given this to me to share this with others, and so he does.

He's also very organized. If you've read the book of Proverbs, you realize that topics change every two to three verses sometimes. It's almost scattered. You have to do topical studies through Proverbs to find all of the verses that apply to the same topic oftentimes. Until you get to this chapter. Because in verse 7, 11, 15, 18, 21, 24 and 29, he's a real good guy at comparing one thing with another. He'll say there's two of these and three of these and four of these. He's very organized in his thinking and he teaches that way. He writes about the ideal life. Chapter 30 is all about if things were as they should be, this is the kind of life that we could live.

But again, I wanted to just take one portion of this. I taught this study maybe five years ago on a Wednesday night, but I thought it was appropriate for us to look at it on a Sunday morning with all of us, especially as we come towards the New Year. It is a picture of four examples of creation, little creatures weak in and of themselves that instinctively are wise in what they have been given to be able to accomplish. In all of them there are inherent weaknesses, but by some measure of strength that God has provided, they are able to overcome.

Instinct from a biblical standpoint is God's gift to the animal kingdom. It is something that they don't earn or can't claim to have developed themselves. It is something that God gives to His creation. And they are guided by the Lord to do what wisdom would dictate is best, though they only are instinctive in that path to behave in that manner. By comparison, you and I are given the Holy Spirit, and we are given God's Word, and we have spiritual qualities that God would like to develop in us; not instinctively, but by the gift of God's Spirit who has come to dwell in those who believe in Him. And so the comparison is made between these creatures that are instinctively given by God gifts, and then to you and I -- weak in many ways, and not able to stand, and yet by God's grace be able to be wise.

So verse 24 kind of sets the stage. It said, "There are four things that are little upon the earth, and yet they are exceedingly wise." Four little things that are exceedingly wise that belies their size, if you will. The first one is the ant. "The ants are a people not strong, but they prepare their food in the summer." Certainly one of the most populace insects on the planet, they are everywhere. In fact, the writer here calls them a people. They are colonial. They are structured. They are civilized in their survival skills. Everyone in an ant colony has a job to do, whether it's the queen, who lays her eggs, or the workers that feed the laborers, or the soldier ants that defend the nest. Whatever it might be, there is a society here. And they are small, we read that here in verse 24, but they are exceedingly wise. They are not strong, but they prepare their food in the summer.

How smart do you think an average ant can be? How big is an ant's brain? Scientists tell us -- I have no idea how they come up with this -- that the average ant is as intelligent as an elephant, whose brain is far greater in size, and way

smarter than a bull, who has a huge brain and goes nowhere fast. But notice that these creatures, the first example, the ants, they don't survive by their strength, because they don't have any, but they survive by their instinctive wisdom. In this case in verse 25, their wisdom is that they plan ahead. They plan ahead.

Now, you know from experience that ants are great communicators. If you let something like food, sit in your sink or on the counter and you go to bed, chances are in the morning the whole population of ants in your neighborhood have been invited over for a picnic. They are a people not strong. Remember verse 24, exceedingly small, great -- and exceedingly wise. They are a tiny people. You can crush 100 ants under your foot in one step. But individually, ants are pretty strong. They can pull 1,000 percent of their body weight. Be like a 200-pound man pulling a ton around. So, pretty powerful. But yet, to us an ant is insignificant; right? They are an occasional bother.

Agur's first example of these are that they are little, yet extremely wise, because here's why: Ants make very good use of the hot summer months to prepare their homes for the winter when they are not able to prepare at all. Ants are given an instinct by God, prepare while the preparing is good, because you're going to have to survive the winter months. Ants can't swim. They hate water. You water your lawn, they oftentimes come up out of their nests. They hate snow skiing, so that doesn't work for them either. But God set them before us so that we might consider their laboring, knowing their gathering times are limited and their days of opportunity are soon gone, and either they're going to be ready for the winter or they're going to die because they haven't prepared.

So we, like the ant, are given by the Lord a wisdom that we should not be just preparing for temporal things, but we have an eternity to plan for. We plan for retirement, we've made plans for vacation. We make a lot of plans for a lot of things. Yet the application is here that we should be wise in our spiritual planning, because life here is very short by comparison to the life that waits for us, and we would be wise to plan for eternal things. Small, but exceedingly wise. The ant is wise because it knows in the summer it has to prepare for their food for the winter months.

So are we as wise as the ants in planning for our eternity? "It's appointed unto man," Paul said, "once to die, and then

comes the judgment." The Psalmist would write, "Lord, teach us to number our days, that we might apply our hearts to wisdom." Eventually you run out of days, and what really could be more important than planning for that day when you have to stand before the Lord and give an account of your life? The priorities that you put on things, what moved you, you're going to have to answer for that. Wouldn't that be something you'd want to plan for and think about as you live this life? What more important things could there be to do than that? How foolish to live consumed only by this life and not plan for the next one? If the ants hadn't planned in the summer, they would have starved in the winter. But they're small, yet they survive by instinctual wisdom. They plan ahead, and so should we.

Do you remember that story that Jesus told, the parable in Luke 16, about an unjust steward? A fellow was given the job of being a business manager for an extremely wealthy man, and I don't know how long he did his job, but there came a time when he was accused of mismanaging the funds, maybe embezzling some of them. And if you read the whole story, you realize fairly quickly this guy was not unjustly accused. He was guilty. But the rich man didn't know that yet. He was a fair man. He said, "We're going to do an audit. We're going to look into this. We're going to see where this goes. And I'll just let you know, if we catch you in the act here, if we find out that you've done this, then you're going to have -- well, you're going to lose your job." But he allowed him to stay on the job, because he didn't want to accuse him without knowing for sure. Well, this fellow was a pretty smart guy when it came to worldly wisdom, and so while he had some time, while the investigation was going on, he knew that he would probably be found as guilty, he began to plan ahead. He began to call the accounts of those who owed his rich boss money or goods. He said to one fellow, "How much do you owe my master?" And he said, "Well, I owe him 100 measures of oil." And he said, "Here's the bill. Cross it out. Put that you only owe 50 and I'll sign it." He went to the next guy. He said, "How much do you owe my master?" He said, "I owe him 100 bushels of wheat." He said, "Here, cross that out. Put 80 here, and I'll sign it." And so he went from one to the other, using that interim as a crooked steward to curry favor with those clients of his boss's that he could then feather his nest with. They all now owed him something and he planned when he got fired to turn up the pressure on these folks, and they were now indebted to him for favors.

Well, the audit came in and he was indeed a crook, and he was

fired. But in the firing, the master said to him, "The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generations than are the sons of light." In other words, the world and the people in it surely know how to work the world for their own benefit. I mean, here is a guy, sure, he's a crook, but he's a smart crook, and he knew this would work. And it worked for him. But the Lord used that as an example to say, here are folks who are willing to plan ahead, who are willing to look ahead and make a way for themselves in the world. And he commended them, not for cheating, but for being shrewd, taking his position presently and using it as an opportunity to prepare for his future -- for this guy the disgrace and the loss of job that he was going to get. Well, then Jesus makes that spiritual application. He said, "They're smarter in the world, working around in the world than the children of light, God's people are. As they prepare for the future, they don't make that kind of preparations at all. Not like those in the world."

I remember years ago Pastor Chuck teaching this passage, and him saying to us on a Sunday night there at Calvary Costa Mesa, "Have you ever thought about the wisdom of acid washed jeans?" He said, "It doesn't benefit anyone else but the seller." He said, "Think about it: We are now going to charge you twice as much for these jeans, and we are going to take half the life out of them." And people go, I got to have me one of those. Today I guess the more holes in your pants, the more expensive then. I have no idea. I get a hole in my pants, I usually go get more pants, but what do I know?

But the world is smart, isn't it? They know how to manipulate the world for their own benefit. And the Lord's application was, you should be that smart as the children of light, and then He said, if you are going to make money or make yourself friends of unrighteous mammon, then use them for eternal purposes, because you can't serve God and money. And His application was, look, use whatever you have in this life to prepare for the life that is coming, because the minute you die, you'll never write another check. Your currency in heaven is no good. And by the way, the streets are made out of gold anyway. So use whatever here, whatever it is, and seek to transfer it or convert it to eternal goods. The purpose was clear: plan ahead. Plan ahead. Using temporal time for eternal purposes. That's the lesson. And then what did He say there in Luke Chapter 12, "Wherever your treasure is, that's where you'll find your heart." So if the time is short and the day of reckoning is coming, then let's use everything we have to lay up treasures for that time when

we're going to stand before the Lord.

So take your lead from the ant. You ought to be smart, not instinctively, but being led of the spirit, then plan for eternity using this time to gather spiritual fruit that will last.

Second of all, verse 26, "The rock badgers are a feeble folk, but they make their homes in the crags." The rock badger, sometimes translated coney. The Hebrew word is "shaphan." It is a description of an unclean animal that you will only find in the Mid East. They're not very tall. They have very bristly hair. They kind of look like an overgrown guinea pig. I have a picture of one of them sitting under a bench where I was teaching in Engedi smiling at me with those big teeth of his. We had a kid on our trip to Israel not this last time, but two times ago, who thought it would be fun to try to feed him by hand. He fed him his finger, and then we had to get him shots, and he learned not to feed these things by hand. But rock badgers, I think they call them coneys in Israel, they live in families. They are timid. They are very quick to retreat. They are indeed feeble folks. There's no way that they can protect themselves from predators. They're really defenseless creatures. Instinctively they compensate for their feebleness by the place they choose to live. It says they dwell in the rocks. As protection, coneys make their homes in the rocks and in the holes of very sheer cliffs, especially there in Engedi you'll see a lot of them, where few people can go. So their safety is this chosen place of residence. They are as safe as the rocks are strong. Feeble, verse 24, small, but exceedingly wise, and their wisdom is where they make their house.

Well, Jesus spoke to you and I of the value of building our house, our life, upon the Rock. In fact, if you read there in Matthew Chapter 7 towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, He defined those building their house upon the Rock as those that would hear His word and then do it. The way you build your house on the Rock is you listen to what God has to say, and you live that way; right? You build your life on the Word of God and on His direction. Be a doer of the Word. Alone, you don't stand a chance against the onslaught of the enemy. He is far more powerful than you. One of the definitions in the Bible of a wise man is someone who recognizes their weaknesses. The devil is more powerful than you every time. You'll never defeat him on your own. He roars like a lion, seeking whom he may devour.

We had a kid on our block when I was a kid that was bigger than everybody and beat the snot out of all of us at some point. And we hated this kid, but we were all terrified of him -- except sometimes my dad would walk me to school and then I would make faces at the kid. I'd stick out my tongue and -- I was brave when my pop was around. But when he wasn't, I ran by that kid's house really fast, because he was really big, and not very kind.

It's wise to know your weakness, wise to build your house upon the Rock. If you try to live this life without the Lord's direction and wisdom, you're no match for it. It will take you out. You'll be a sitting duck. So learn from the coney. Choose wisely your dwelling place. We can live in a place where the enemy can't get to us. Hard to worry when God's made promises. Hard to fear when He's with you. I can remain strong and safe. I'm no match for the devil, but the devil is no match for my God.

So the ant plans ahead, the coney chooses the right place to dwell. Verse 27, "The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in their ranks." His third example is of what is little upon the earth but exceedingly wise is the locusts. You know what they are. They are the epitome in nature of success through teamwork.

I don't know if you've ever seen a locust swarm. You can turn on YouTube, you'll find a few of them, especially in Africa and some of the plains. They invade in swarms. They bring so many friends with them, the sky goes dark. There have been cases where the swarm of locusts have so cluttered the road and made it slick with their bodies that cars slide off the road. Trains won't operate. Planes won't fly. En masse they are absolutely unstoppable. They take out every bit of vegetation. They conquer by a united combined effort. Their wisdom is to prevail in numbers. Notice what we read here: They advance in ranks. They work together. A single locust, like a grasshopper, not too threatening. Even 100 of them post little threat. But bring 10 million of them, or 100 million, and you want to go in the house and not come out.

Now, they don't have a king. Instinctively they gather together, they move as one. They don't have a rallying cry. They don't have an official leader to organize them. But their success really depends on two things: Number one, selflessness, and number two, fellowship. They have to go

together if they're going to make it work. They have to stand together.

I think we can learn much from that as the body of Christ and the local fellowship. God speaks a lot about the church being a body. I think that we view the church sometimes far differently. I've had people say to me, "I don't think I have to go to church to be a Christian." No, but if you're going to be successful as one, you will need to go to church, because all of us have gifts and we don't all have all of them. I need your gifts, you need mine. We need to do this together. That's how God intended to go. That was what removes jealousy and bickering. That's why the Bible says God hates those who sow discord among the brethren, because it steals away from the functionality of just being in the church. There's a lot of folks who come and go at church like it's a place that they attend and they hope it gets over soon. "I've been there. I've done my thing." They show up as little as possible, they get involved in as little as they can, and they just want to punch their time card. "I was there." But that's not church. Church is a body; a hand, a foot, an eye, an ear. It functions that way. It can't function any other way.

Here's a smart little guy who brings a billion friends with him so he can live and survive. We need that in the church. If we're going to overcome and bear much fruit, we are going to quickly have to learn that we have need for one another and there's great benefit to being united in front, and that there aren't any Lone Rangers in the Bible when it comes to serving the Lord. You separate from the group, you don't survive. That's Satan's plan: Isolate and destroy.

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they ran headlong into the Amalekites, a tough bunch of desert dwelling fighters. They represent the flesh. But for now, all they represented was death to the Israelites. And the Lord had Moses go up into the mountain looking over the battlefield and he said, "Hold out that staff that I've given you." And he held it out, and as he did, these Jews who were not prepared for war, weren't equipped to fight, began to win. God miraculously began to give them together, collectively, under God's blessing, victory. But Moses is an old guy, and after a while his arm got tired and that staff fell, and then the people started to lose, because they needed to learn their only victory was in God's power. And so Moses needed help, and he called on Aaron and Hur, two younger guys, and said to them, "Hold up my arms, man." And so, here's old Moses,

80 years plus, and he can't barely hold the thing up, and he's got two boys just holding up his arm, and the blessing came and the victory followed, and God blessed them. But it took all of them together. You see the same thing in Judges. The gathering of all the men as one man, we read. That's how it works in the church.

Locusts should teach us, even though we have very little strength on our own, that together we have a lot of strength. And God will help us to overcome. Read the book of Nehemiah, Chapter 4, when they began to build the walls and pretty soon the enemy is attacking, so some watched and protected while others worked; and when it got even worse, they all worked with one hand and kept a weapon in the other, but the work got done. It's a good thing we have Sunday school workers here this morning, and folks that are in the nursery watching your little ones, or worship people that know how to sing and actually play notes, or folks that go to the prison or to the convalescent homes. We have missionaries that haven't been home for five or six years, some of them; devoted to what they're doing, living in places that are difficult at best. You know what we do for them? We send them money and pray for them. You know what they do? They live their lives gathering fruit for you and for me. It's a good thing that we're not all called there, but we're so thankful that they are. And so we share together in the work God has given us to do, and the only thing we're called to do is be faithful to our calling. That's all. And take that place amongst the body. Satan's strategy is always the same: Get you out of the church, get you away from people, isolate you with lives that are so busy you have neither time for church nor people in the church, and then he's got you.

They don't have a king, these locusts, but we do. They have instinct. We have a King to follow and to serve together, so that we might overcome the world. Ants plan ahead. Badgers know where to live. Locusts serve together.

And finally, verse 28, "The spider skillfully grasps with his hands, and it lives in the kings' palaces." Agur's fourth example of something that is small upon the earth yet extremely wise despite its size are these spiders. Now, the word spider here is an interesting word, because in Hebrew it is the word for lizard. We suspect that he might be speaking about geckos by its description, but I think this word spider might be a translational issue that would leave you a little bit confused.

If you've ever gone to the tropics -- Mexico, Hawaii, Costa Rica, the Yucatan, South Pacific, Philippines -- you'll run into lots of geckos. We were in the Cook Islands on vacation this year, off the coast of New Zealand, and they were everywhere. The good thing is, geckos eat cockroaches. The bad news is, they hang upside down over your head. And sometimes they anoint you. It's true. Well, you want me to tell you the whole story, don't you? They hang on by these little ingenious feet that God has given them that they have, like, these pods on their toes that allow them to secrete this sticky substance, and you can watch them walk up glass or marble. They're amazing. And they can stretch themselves so thin that they can get into your house through the littlest kind of hole. You think you got it all plugged up. Oh, no, they'll figure out a way to get in. They're amazing that way. But because they hang on, they can live in the king's house. The king probably doesn't want them in his house. But there they are, living in luxury. Their wisdom that compensate for their lack of size or strength is their ability to securely hang on, and the result is they live in luxury.

I don't think you'd have me to help you to decide what that means then to you. I mean, God has given to you great and precious promises that if you'll hang on to them, you'll live a rich life in Christ. You'll be blessed. You'll live better than those in the world who have it all, because you have what God has given, and it will last. David wrote, "I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever." How do you do that? Well, hang on tight to those promises that are on your lap right now. Don't let go. Be tenacious. The enemy is going to try to steal from you your handhold, your grip. He is going to try to undermine you by discrediting what God has said or telling you you should be more realistic, and he tries to knock your feet out from under you. But don't let him do that, because we can learn from this little creature that we should hang on. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He's near. Go possess the land. Do it. Hang on. And you can have joy and peace and rest and hope.

Four little creatures who by God's creation are given instincts that parallel the spiritual qualities that God would provide for you. Wise attributes that would bless your life. Four lessons, easy to remember: plan ahead; make your home on the Lord; see the value of fellowship, not only in what you get from it, but what you put into it; and hang on tenaciously to all God has said and you'll end up being wise. Though you are weak in this world, though you are small by comparison, you'll be exceedingly wise.

I like these verses, don't you? It'll be a good thing to plan for this coming year.