

JULY 22, 1990

PROVERBS IN PICTURES.

You may have heard about the lady in Crab Orchard, Tennessee who predicts the kinds of winters we will have based on such observations as the thickness of the corn shucks, the amount of fuzz on woolly worms, or the number of fogs in August. There may be some correlation there and I guess a student of nature could start to relate events. There are probably many lessons about life that can be learned by observing natural phenomena. A good teacher could use things observed in nature as visual aids to make a point about some truth he might be trying to teach. Such a teaching technique would result in the student thinking about the truth every time he observed the phenomenon in nature. The 30th chapter of Proverbs contains many references to nature and everyday things that we can observe.

¹⁸There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Four which I do not understand: ¹⁹The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, And the way of a man with a maid. Proverbs 30:18-19 (NASB95)

The use of the "three things . . . four" is a literary device that fits in with a type of poetry that was used. It is thought that the things that are grouped together here have a commonality of not being able to trace the path of the objects. If you see an eagle soaring in the sky, you can not tell where it has been because there is no track in the air. The same thing is true of a snake crawling over a rock and (if you wait long enough) the wake behind a ship disappears. I'm not sure what the lesson in life is here. There may be something to be said for not stirring up a lot of dust as we go down the road of life, or not making waves or leaving a mess for someone else to clean up behind you. There are some people who leave a trail of trouble where ever they go. Maybe the lesson is that we are passing through this world and we should do so like the eagle passes through the air. Some might argue that we ought to leave the world a better place for our having been here. I think we can do that without leaving a trail with our signature on it. Jesus said, "When you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

There are other comparison the writer uses to paint a picture of attitudes and action to be avoided.

²¹Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: ²²Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, ²³Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress. Proverbs 30:21-23 (NASB95)

It is a really frightening things for a small-minded person to be in charge of anything. The comparison that is pictured here is that of a servant who becomes a king. In the next verse the picture is extended to females as well as male when the writer give reference to a handmaid becoming heir to her mistress. In the mind of most people a servant would not have the background nor the proper kind of attitude to reign well. Many times people that were servants were probably mentally slow and immature in their thinking. The lesson for us to learn is that when we find ourselves in positions of leadership, then we must not let selfishness and pettiness get in the way of doing a good job.

The picture of a fool who has his hunger satisfied would be frightening in that now that such a person is no longer occupied with the necessities of life, he might start plotting and planning mischief. There is a recognition here that we have a hierarchy of needs. The first is "survival" and that includes such things as physical safety and food to eat. Once a person gets such needs satisfied, then they go about establishing relationship and then ultimately expressing themselves in what they do. This is the fear that a fool will start expressing himself and if he does, then all the world will suffer for it. When you see graffiti or notice vandalism or even see some of the art expressions of the day, then you can remember this verse and know what the writer had in mind.

The problem of the unloved woman who is married is probably referring to a situation of multiple wives and one wife who is not loved by the husband. She becomes very much down on herself and everyone else. As a consequence, life becomes miserable for her and all who are

associated with her.

²⁴Four things are small on the earth, But they are exceedingly wise: ²⁵The ants are not a strong people, But they prepare their food in the summer; ²⁶The shephanim are not mighty people, Yet they make their houses in the rocks; ²⁷The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks; ²⁸The lizard you may grasp with the hands, Yet it is in kings' palaces. Proverbs 30:24-28 (NASB95)

There are lessons to be learned from watching small animals and insects. For example the ants are highly organized and have a very structured society that is operated to propagate the species. They gather food and prepare for times when they cannot find food. The lesson is obvious for us that we should be able to follow good leadership, work together for the common good, and prepare for the future. The conies are small animals that would be defenseless to all sorts of varmints and predators if they did not make use of what they had available. The lesson is that we must have a defense in place if our society is going to survive. The defenses that we need are not limited to military defense but to more subtle threats such as invasions of immorality and godless thought processes. The reference to the locust working together even though they have no leader may be a continuation of the previous reference to ants. We might be able to understand that the queen ant gives out signals that instructs the worker ants and soldier ants as to what they should do; however, even when we don't have good leadership, then we ought to have the good sense to work together to accomplish our purposes in life and especially in areas where survival is at stake. The reference to spiders (or as some translations have it, lizards) may be related to the importance of determination and taking things into our own hands to make them happen. Some people never amount to much because "they never got a break." Usually, "breaks" come to who make things happen in their favor.

²⁹There are three things which are stately in *their* march, Even four which are stately when they walk: ³⁰The lion *which* is mighty among beasts And does not retreat before any, ³¹The strutting rooster, the male goat also, And a king *when his* army is with him. Proverbs 30:29-31 (NASB95)

The obvious lesson here is "we ought to look the part of who we are." The lion looks like the king of the jungle, the greyhound looks fast, the ram is muscular and like the one in charge, and of course the king is outfitted in his royal attire. Many times we forget about the importance of appearance. We have a tendency to think that "it what's inside that counts" and while that IS true, we may never get a chance to demonstrate what is on the inside if others have developed a wrong impression about us based on our appearance. We can't agree with "Image is everything" but we have to admit, when dealing with others, our appearance matters.

³²If you have been foolish in exalting yourself Or if you have plotted *evil*, *put your* hand on your mouth. ³³For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of anger produces strife. Proverbs 30:32-33 (NASB95)

The message of the Bible presents a balance of ideas and we see such a balance presented here. Following on the heels of advice about our appearance is an admonition about pride and the foolishness of trying to be something that we are not. There is also balance to be wisely used in our efforts to get things done. We cannot just let things happen and expect our lives to be successful. On the other hand, being too aggressive and pushing too hard will lead to trouble and failure. The successful person uses tact and seeks cooperation rather than trying to force change on people.

There are significant lessons we can learn by observing the world around us. As we relate the wisdom we know to the common place, then we are constantly reminded to do the wise thing and make the wise choice as we see these everyday reminders.