

Introduction: I Am Too Stupid to Be a Man (30:1-9)

The beginning of Proverbs 30 probably did not give you very much confidence in Agur:

The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The oracle.

The man declares, I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out.

Surely I am too stupid to be a man.

I have not the understanding of a man.

I have not learned wisdom,

nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. (30:1-3)

Perhaps you find this somewhat comforting.

Hey! He’s just like me!

But is this the sort of person you would take as a mentor?

A teacher of wisdom?

But as we have seen, the book of Proverbs is not altogether impressed
with people who think they know everything!

Who was this Agur, son of Jakeh?

We do not know.

All we know is that he was a Hebrew wise man probably some time after the time of David.

But we also know that he was an honest man.

He didn’t pretend that he had all the answers.

He presents himself as one who had *not* learned wisdom.

In this way he serves as something of a foil to Solomon.

Solomon and the other wise men of Proverbs have taken the stance of teachers—
those who set forth the path of wisdom.

But Agur says “I have not the understanding of a man.

I have not learned wisdom,

nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.”

Why should we listen to a man who has not learned wisdom?

Well, Agur asks – have you done better than me?

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?

Who has gathered the wind in his fists?

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is his name, and what is his son’s name?

Surely you know! (30:4)

This has echoes of Job, as well as Proverbs 8.

Wisdom is connected with creation.
If you would be truly wise,
 then you would be able to rule the heavens and the earth.
The one who is truly wise is able to ascend to heaven and come down.
The one who is truly wise can gather the wind in his fist.
 So long as you are unable to gather the wind in your fist,
 you have not attained to the highest wisdom!

Man is *not* the measure of all things.
Our modern world is built on the Enlightenment's claim that man *is* the measure of all things.
 But as the last couple hundred years have demonstrated quite clearly,
 unaided human reason cannot attain to wisdom.
In order to be fully human, we need to know God.

The last question is especially interesting:
What is his name, and what is his son's name?
 What is the name of the creator?
 What is the name of the one who established all the ends of the earth?
That's easy.
 Yahweh.
What is his son's name?
 It is not entirely clear what Agur is doing here.
 Is Agur referring to Israel, the son of God?
 Or perhaps the Davidic king, whom God promised would rule
 with a rod of iron over the nations.
 Or is Agur pointing out that unlike human kings,
 God does not need a son in order for his rule to continue?
 This may be the reason for his mocking comment, "surely you know!"

But whatever may have been Agur's motivation behind this question,
 the question takes on fresh significance in the light of the coming of Jesus Christ.

If you would learn wisdom,
 you must not only understand who created the heavens and the earth,
 but you must also know his son!

The language of ascending to heaven is rooted in Deuteronomy 30:11-12,
 where Moses says that the commandment to love the LORD your God with all your heart
 "is not in heaven, that you should say, 'who will ascend to heaven for us
 and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it.'"
Enoch ascended to heaven—as did Elijah—
 but neither of them came back!
Who has ascended to heaven and come down?
 The builders of the tower of Babel tried it—
 but God refused to let them up into his heaven.

The ziggurats of the ancient world were symbols of man's efforts to ascend into heaven,
just like the space program in the modern world.
But the higher we get, the further away the heavens become!

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?

Jesus echoes this in John 3:13 when he says to Nicodemus,
"No one has ascended into heaven except him who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."
Remember that Nicodemus came to Jesus seeking wisdom—
Jesus reveals to Nicodemus that the Son of Man is the source of wisdom.
And as Proverbs has made clear from the start,
if you find wisdom, you find life.

Agur acknowledges that he is not the source of wisdom and understanding,
but he knows where wisdom and understanding may be found:
*Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar. (30:5-6)*

In this world there are many voices competing for your allegiance.
You are called to find refuge in consumer goods,
you are told that a good career will provide satisfaction.
Those voices are adding to the word of God.
God rebukes them and uncovers their lies:
God himself is our refuge and our fort;
Let God be true and every man a liar!

And now the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us.
The wisdom of God has taken human form.
The wisdom that was in the beginning with God
has brought a new beginning—
The one through whom God created the heavens and the earth
is establishing a new heavens and a new earth.

Because only the Creator could be the Redeemer.

And so with this foundation, Agur makes two requests of God:
*Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:
1) remove far from me falsehood and lying—*
in other words, may I heed *your* word, and not add to your word,
but rest content in what God says about me!

We have a predilection for falsehood.
We deceive ourselves – and we seek our own "truths"

2) give me neither poverty nor riches;

*feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you and say "Who is the LORD?"
or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God. (30:7-9)*

How much is "riches"?

Whatever amount brings you to the point where you no longer trust in God,
but in pride and arrogance you become complacent in your wealth!

How much is "poverty"?

Whatever amount brings you to the point where you no longer trust in God,
but in desperation you steal from others.

Sure – we are responsible for our own actions –
but the wise man seeks to live a moderate life.

The central portion of Proverbs 30 consists of numerical proverbs with the refrain,
"three things...even four."

There are four of these "three things...even four" interwoven with a pair of "fours"
and some freestanding proverbs.

If you see each of the "three things...even four" as concluding the item before it,
however, you can see the pattern of the chapter.

Seven Numerical Sayings (v10-31)

1. Disruptions of the Tongue (10-16)

a. Do Not Slander a Servant to His Master (v10)

b. Three Numerical Sayings on Greed (v11-16)

The first section deals with the tongue in verses 10-16.

First comes the warning:

Do not slander a servant to his master, lest he curse you and you be held guilty.

A servant is helpless.

If you (presumably a trusted member of the community)

slander a servant to his master,

the master will most likely believe you and punish his servant.

The servant will then curse you–

and God will heed that curse,

because you slandered one who could not defend himself.

This is followed by four kinds of those who exalt themselves:

- 1) those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers
- 2) those who are clean in their own eyes, but are not washed of their filth
- 3) those who are lofty in their own eyes (how high their eyelids lift!)
- 4) those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives
to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind.

Would you be wise and understanding?

Then understand that all is not as it seems.

There are those who think that they have it all together.

They think they are clean—this describes the Pharisees in the NT—
and yet they are not washed of their filth.
They appear to have it all together—
but they are not as they appear.

The leech has two daughters: give and give (v15).

They continue to suck the life out of those to whom they cling.
There are people who latch on to you and suck the life out of you—
such are the leech's two daughters.
But then there is the Son of the God,
who unites you to himself and pours his life into you!

The story is told of one the desert fathers – a man named John –
who would sit by the door of the monks' little church building in Scetis,
and listen to the troubles of his fellow monks.

One day, one of the younger monks came to John and asked,
“How can you keep listening to others and counseling them?
Don't you burn out?”

John replied by saying “go light a candle.”

The young monk did so and returned with a lit candle.

“Okay, now light a second candle from the first.”

So he did.

“Tell me, was the light from the first candle diminished when you lit the second?”

“No, Abba”

“Even so it is with John.

The light within me is not my own –
but is the light of Christ shining within me.”

You will find that as you pour your own life out for others,
that Christ, who is your life, will continue to pour himself out in and through you.
There is a never-ending source of wisdom, life, and power.

So how does burnout happen?

We burn out when we rely upon our own strength and energy.

We burn out when we do *not* draw our strength from Christ.

Even so, there are three never-ending vacuums that are never satisfied:

Three things are never satisfied; four that never say “Enough”

Sheol—the grave is never satisfied,

but continues to grasp after the living;

the barren womb—if you have ever been close to a barren woman,
you know what this is saying—

a woman who longs for a child – but there is none!

It hurts!

And of course in the OT, the barren womb meant more than it does today!
Because barrenness symbolized the curse—
if women stopped having children,
then God’s purposes in redemption would be thwarted!
If the Seed was never born, then truly Sheol would be victorious!
The land never satisfied with water—
No matter how often it rains, the land keeps soaking it in.
And not only land and water, but also
the fire that never says “Enough”!
A fire will only cease to burn when it has nothing left to consume!

Bruce Waltke points out that there is a double parallel going on here.
“The chiasmic parallels place in the outer frame the insatiable end makers.
The grave implicitly craves bodies, and fire craves combustibles.
In the inner core stand the insatiable life makers:
the barren womb implicitly craving seed
and the arable soil craving water.
But what is the point?...
These four insatiates, which represent life and death,
[are] engaged in unending battle as long as the earth endures.
Until God separates the wheat from the chaff,
greedy tyrants never say, ‘Enough!’
and the righteous ever strives to produce life.” (W 488)

The concluding three...even four replies to those who devour the poor and needy—
those who are clean in their own eyes, but are not washed of their filth—
there is fire and death in store for you!

2. Disruptions of Proper Order (v17-31)
a. Do Not Mock Your Parents (v17)
b. Four Numerical Sayings on Boundaries (18-31)

Verses 17-19 then uses animals to connect its themes:

*The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother
will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures.
Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:
the way of an eagle in the sky,
the way of a serpent on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas,
and the way of a man with a virgin.*

The opening proverbs connects us back to 30:11—
those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers.
Judgment will come on those who mock their parents:

you can hear echoes of this in Revelation at the great supper of God,
where God invites the birds of the heavens to feast upon the bodies of the wicked!

But, Agur says, I do not understand these things:

I do not understand the way of an eagle in the sky–
the mystery of flight–

I do not understand the way of a serpent on a rock–
the mystery of walking without legs–

I do not understand the way of a ship on the high seas–
the mystery of floatation–

and I do not understand the way of a man with a maiden–
the mystery of sex.

You scorn your parents–yet you came from them!

How is it that you dare to speak ill of them,
when they were once just like you?

Displacing the Rightful Order (20-23)

But if I do not understand the way of a man with a maiden,
I do understand the way of the adulteress!

This is the way of the adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done no wrong'

The way of a man with a virgin is the God-ordained way–
therefore it is “too wonderful for me.”

it is a wonder – a marvel – a delight!

The way of an adulteress, however, is perfectly understandable,
because it is man’s perversion of God’s ways.

The adulteress refuses to accept the boundaries that God has established.

And the claim, “I have done no wrong” –

has been the claim of rebellious humanity in every generation.

Our society claims that so long as both parties consent, you can do whatever you want!

But we ignore the harm done to others.

We need to recognize that *God’s ways* are best – because he made the world –
and he knows the right way to live in his world!

Even so, when God’s rightful order is perverted, the earth itself trembles:

Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up:

a slave when he becomes king–this would turn the world upside down!

and a fool when he is filled with food.

an unloved woman when she gets a husband,

and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress.

In our day we like to root for the underdog–

the servant girl who marries the millionaire,
the slave who becomes a king—
we love these stories!
But Agur is talking about “the way of an adulteress”—
the cheap way out.
The way of folly and of death.
It is the maidservant displacing her mistress by sleeping with her master.
It is the servant assassinating the king and taking his place through deceit.
(and the term *ebed* – “slave” – is used to refer a king’s “officials” –
so it’s not necessarily a “slave” revolt here).
But the official is supposed to be loyal to his king
(think of Ahithophel – who joined Absalom’s rebellion).
When the king’s counselors betray his trust,
the safety of the community is undermined.
The problem comes when wickedness and folly rule,
and yet say, “I have done no wrong!”

The Four Small Wise Things (24-31)

In contrast to such folly,
verses 24-28 set forth four small things that are yet “exceedingly wise.”
One commentator refers to them as the “four wee but wise beasties” (W 495).

God’s world reflects his wisdom.

God created all things – and so all things reflect something about God.
But notice that each of these “wee but wise beasties”
are deficient in something.
The ants are *not strong*.
The rock badgers are *not mighty*.
The locusts *have no king*.
The lizard can be taken in the hand.

If natural theology was simply a matter of observation,
then you might observe anything about anything and make it mean anything!!
But natural theology reflects the same God who has revealed himself in his word.
Therefore, if you would understand the meaning of the created order –
you must see it in the light of the one who made all things!

The four wee wise beasties contrast with the four “there are those” in verses 11-14.

The ants are a people not strong yet they provide their food in the summer.

Go to the ant, O sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise!

They work together diligently to bring food into their storehouse for the winter.

They show foresight – they plan for the winter.

The rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs.

Consider what God has given you.

You can do far more with what you have than you think!

Rock badgers have no shovels; they do not build with nails, or posts—
yet they have quite comfortable homes built out of what God gave them

The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.

No one issues commands to the locust—they work together by instinct.

A grasshopper by itself is pretty harmless —

but when they band together as a locust swarm —
the result is terrifying!

We may not be much by ourselves — we don't have much power — not much influence —
but *together* we show forth the glory and power of the kingdom of Jesus!

The lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in king's palaces.

Anyone can catch a lizard, yet this common creature is found in palaces.

(So do not assume that your own “commonness”
means that you will amount to nothing!)

The “three things...even four of verses 29-31 then continue to use the animal theme
in order to demonstrate the path of wisdom:

Three things are stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride:

the lion, which is mightiest among beasts and does not turn back before any;

the strutting rooster,

the he-goat,

and a king whose army is with him.

A king whose army is with him is like a lion, or rooster, or he-goat,
proud and stately, with no fear of defeat.

When all things are as they should be, the king goes before his people with confidence.

Conclusion: If you have been foolish (30:32-33)

If you have been foolish, exalting yourself,

or if you have been devising evil,

put your hand on your mouth.

Have you been foolish?

Have you forgotten the path of wisdom?

Have you been exalting yourself, or devising evil?

If so, then put your hand on your mouth.

Stop it.

For pressing milk produces curds,

pressing the nose produces blood,

and pressing anger produces strife.

Stop pushing.

Learn wisdom from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh,
the wisdom of God in human vesture,
the Son of God who has brought life and wisdom to those who trust in him.

Do not exalt yourself–
that is the way of the adulteress–
that is the way of those who are clean in their own eyes, but who are not washed of their filth.

Humble yourself before the Lord.

For every word of God proves true.

Humble yourself and submit to his word.

And yes, this means that you need to read it.

This means that you need to be praying regularly with and for each other!