



Proverbs chapter 30:1-31:31

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 12th December 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-14

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Tonight, we conclude our study of the book of Proverbs. And over the last 14 weeks we've looked at 29 chapters of wisdom, recorded by Solomon - the wisest man who ever lived. And one of the wealthiest too. Throughout this book, we've read again and again of the need to pursue wisdom, to get it, to lay hold of it. And as each week passes, we should ask ourselves if we're really doing that.

Perhaps as a timely warning to us, as we begin chapter 30, we'll see someone in the place we really don't want to be - that is, having heard wisdom, and had the opportunity to apply it, but have failed to do so.

Themes in chapter thirty

Now, chapter 30 flows differently to previous chapters, and can be summarised as conclusions and observations on life. As we progress through the chapter we'll see:

- Conclusions about self (v2-3), God (v4), and His Word (v5-6)
- Conclusions on what's best for us (v7-10)
- Six observations on life - in groups of four (v11-31)
- Our conduct (v32-33)

Themes in chapter thirty one

Then, in chapter 31 we'll conclude with one of the most famous parts of this book - known as the virtuous wife, or as J Vernon-McGee suggests it could be called, "Advice on how to choose a wife".

But that's from verse 10 onwards, and before that we'll see a mother address her son's relationship to three things:

- Women (v3)
- Alcohol (v4-7)
- Those in need (v8-9)

Before concluding with:

- The virtuous wife (v10-31)

Chapter twenty thirty

So, let's get into chapter 30 where we read:

Proverbs 30:1

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance. This man declared to Ithiel—to Ithiel and Ucal:

So, who is Agur, you might ask. Well, there are two opinions I've heard - either, we don't know. Or, this is actually Solomon. And one reason it *may* be Solomon is that the Jewish Talmud notes that "Solomon was called by six names: Solomon, Jedidiah (2Sam. 12:25), Koheleth, Son of Jakeh, Agur, and Lemuel." And if you've read ahead you'll recognise Lemuel as the author of chapter 31.

So it *could* be that Solomon authored the whole book. However, we read in verses 2 & 3...

Proverbs 30:2-3

Surely I am more stupid than any man,
And do not have the understanding of a man.
I neither learned wisdom
Nor have knowledge of the Holy One.

And that leads at least one commentator to conclude that it's either not Solomon writing this, or he wrote this before asking God for wisdom. Personally, I don't think we can conclude that from these verses, as we know that even Solomon made mistakes, especially later in his life.

But regardless, we can be sure that this is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and what we **NEED** to do is apply this to our lives.

And here we see a man in the later years of his life, looking at how his decisions/choices played out - having gone through the school of wisdom, but concluding he is stupid. Why? Well, look at verse 3 again - because while wisdom was taught, He didn't learn. While knowledge was given out, he didn't take it in. In other words, he had the chance, but didn't put the effort in. And he now, in his later days, realises that turning up for class was not enough on its own.

So let us pause for a moment and consider our own state. We have all sat through many Bible studies. Maybe even more than a thousand. But have we learnt anything? Have we applied anything?

There's a great danger in the church today, even in this church, that it's easy to be apathetic. We can turn up most weeks, even every week, but never be changed by what we hear, because we aren't really listening.

So then, let us keep check on ourselves, let us be sure we're thinking about this enough, that we may conclude, as this man does here, that God is greater than we can possibly comprehend.

We read...

Proverbs 30:4

Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has bound 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,
If you know?

We do know His name. We do know His Son's name. And He died to save us. And when we consider who He is, and what He has done for us, we'll want to learn from Him, and about Him. We won't want to sit on the sidelines, but we'll want all that He has for us - including the wisdom of His Word:

Proverbs 30:5

Every word of God is pure;
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

He is a shield to those who DO put their trust in Him. Not those that don't. Let's remind ourselves of what we read in Ephesians 6:

Ephesians 6:14-18

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

Back in Proverbs we read this conclusion about God's Word:

Proverbs 30:6

Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

God's Word alone is sufficient. And similar to this warning, we read in Revelation chapter 22:

Revelation 22:18-19

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

And the principle of this warning is also found in Deuteronomy too:

Deuteronomy 4:2

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

We are not to mess around with the Bible. It is a serious book, that should be taken seriously.

Now, having drawn these conclusions about himself, about how God is beyond our comprehension, and how we are not to meddle with His Word, we see this man conclude what is best for himself (and for us):

Proverbs 30:7-9

Two things I request of You
(Deprive me not before I die):
Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
Give me neither poverty nor riches—
Feed me with the food allotted to 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.

In these later years, Agur has come to realise what is truly important. And it's not money. Not that money isn't helpful. But rather, he sees the worst effect of poverty or riches being damage to his walk with God.

So I wonder, would we?! If we woke up to millions of pounds in our bank account, would we conclude that the worst thing about it was the damage it might do to our relationship with Jesus?

Or if we ran into hard and desperate times - would our biggest worry be acting in a way that displeased or dishonoured God?

Agur further concludes:

Proverbs 30:10

Do not malign a servant to his master,
Lest he curse you, and you be found guilty.

That is, treat others well. Don't go behind others backs. Speak truthfully, and kindly. Just as we've been instructed throughout Proverbs.

Now, next, Agur makes six observations on life - each in groups of four - starting with an observation on what I believe is the younger generation. Something that each generation tends to do, as they themselves grow in maturity, and observe those that have not yet done so. We read:

Proverbs 30:11-14

There is a generation that curses its father,
And does not bless its mother.
There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes,
Yet is not washed from its filthiness.
There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes!
And their eyelids are lifted up.
There is a generation whose teeth are like swords,
And whose fangs are like knives,
To devour the poor from off the earth,
And the needy from among men.

If we observe any of these things, it should bother us too! Sadly, we do see this in the world today, whether in our own generation, younger generations - or both! We see those that are disrespectful to their parents, and applaud those who do the same. We see those that are convinced they are doing right, when in fact their thoughts and actions are evil. We see many who are proud of their sin. And we see those who treat others with contempt - whether in their words or actions.

Yet the Bible warns against all these things, from honouring your parents, to being holy, humble, and tenderhearted - especially to those in need.

Next, Agur notes his observations about things that are never satisfied:

Proverbs 30:15-16

The leech has two daughters—
Give and Give!
There are three things that are never satisfied,
Four never say, "Enough!":
The grave,
The barren womb,
The earth that is not satisfied with water—
And the fire never says, "Enough!"

Indeed, we can relate to this for we all live in a funeral procession as the grave is never satisfied. And we see the persistence of the droughts of Africa and the forest fires of Australia. But the one that touches my heart, is the barren womb. It is such an incredibly hard thing to deal with, and I only understand it in part, but that unmet desire can be so very strong. And we must both have compassion, and be careful with our comments - for someone saying "it'll happen in God's timing" is little to no comfort, when you know that there's no guarantee that children are in God's plan for you as an individual or couple.

In verse 17, Agur intersperses a warning:

Proverbs 30:17

The eye that mocks his father,
And scorns obedience to his mother,
The ravens of the valley will pick it out,
And the young eagles will eat it.

That is, how you treat your parents will come back to bite you - possibly in how your children treat you, or how others perceive you. Definitely a good guideline in dating is to view how someone treats their parents as a mark of their character.

In verses 18 and 19, we have the Agur's next observation:

Proverbs 30:18-19

There are three things which are too wonderful for me,
Yes, four which I do not understand:
The way of an eagle in the air,
The way of a serpent on a rock,
The way of a ship in the midst of the sea,
And the way of a man with a virgin.

Sure, we might say the eagle flaps it's wings, the snake wiggles, and the ship is steered by it's rudder. But that's as an poor explanation of those things as it is to say people fall in love because they like each other. There's much mystery there, despite all the books, films and therapists that try (often poorly) to explain it.

But in verse 20 we read something Agur is crystal clear on:

Proverbs 30:20

This is the way of an adulterous woman:
She eats and wipes her mouth,
And says, "I have done no wickedness."

And this is a horrible reality - it really is a reality. So many people have affairs, or leave their spouses and deny they did anything wrong at all! It's terribly sad. And it's terribly wrong.

He observes further and writes:

Proverbs 30:21-23

For three things the earth is perturbed,
Yes, for four it cannot bear up:
For a servant when he reigns,
A fool when he is filled with food,
A hateful woman when she is married,
And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress.

That is, some things just don't seem right.

It's not that a servant can't become a leader, but rather when he ousts one - it doesn't sit right. Likewise, a fool who does not work, but lands on his feet is bothersome! And I can't tell you how frustrated it made me as a single guy to see people, in particular husbands, act poorly in their marriage. Likewise, how it should sadden and perturb us all when we see the secretary or assistant have an affair with her boss. I think we're all nodding along with Agur at this point!

Next, we read:

Proverbs 30:24-28

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 skillfully grasps with its hands,
And it is in kings' palaces.

Perhaps we should learn some lessons here - whether it be from the ants of Proverbs chapter 6, or finding the safety in our Rock as the rock badgers mentioned here do - which, in case you're wondering, are actually hyrax's native to parts of the middle east and Africa.

Next, Agur makes his final observation:

Proverbs 30:29-31

There are three things which are majestic in pace,
Yes, four which are stately in walk:
A lion, which is mighty among beasts
And does not turn away from any;
A greyhound,
A male goat also,
And a king whose troops are with him.

These are all impressive things – the strength of a lion, the speed of a greyhound, the agility of a mountain goat. And a leader worth following with followers willing to follow.

As he finishes this chapter, Agur makes a final warning:

Proverbs 30:32

If you have been foolish in exalting yourself,
Or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth.

That is, it is never too late to refrain from making a bad situation worse by the things you say! Or to stop things in your heart turning into words and actions.

I like Jon Courson's comment on this – he says: One way to keep from putting your foot in your mouth is to cover your mouth with your hand.

Agur continues:

Proverbs 30:33

For as the churning of milk produces butter,
And wringing the nose produces blood,
So the forcing of wrath produces strife.

That is, don't meddle. Don't start quarrels. Hear matters out before you answer. Don't speak all your thoughts. We should live a quiet peaceable life. Just as Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, quoting from Proverbs 25:

Romans 12:17-21

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Chapter thirty one

So into chapter 31 we go, and as mentioned there is the possibility this was also written by Solomon, which if so, would indicate it is Bathsheba, his mother, that he is talking about in this first verse:

Proverbs 31:1

The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him:

And that is how a loving parent should act - teaching them! I think we should be especially careful to do this, for many others are willing to teach our children too - from the depraved shows you can find on Netflix, to the horrors you'll find elsewhere on the Internet - be it on social media, or in your Google search results.

Proverbs 31:2

What, my son?

And what, son of my womb?

And what, son of my vows?

This is a mother asking - What are you going to do? How are you going to live your life? Because you have choices ahead.

Proverbs 31:3

Do not give your strength to women,

Nor your ways to that which destroys kings.

So first up; don't waste your time with women who'd make a waste of your life. Don't compromise, because it will destroy you. Oh, that every Christian mother would warn their sons to choose a wife carefully, to obey the Lord and only marry a Christian, and to save themselves for marriage. And oh that every Christian father would warn their daughters in the same manner.

And don't let past failure on your part, stop you setting your children up for future success in the area of relationships. Indeed, if this was Bathsheba, then she certainly knew the problems disobedience would bring. She'd been part of that with David.

Second, she warns:

Proverbs 31:4-5

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,

It is not for kings to drink wine,

Nor for princes intoxicating drink;

Lest they drink and forget the law,

And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

I think her heart here is saying that how others conduct themselves is irrelevant. You are not responsible for their actions, but you are responsible for yours! And especially as a king, being drunk could have disastrous consequences for others.

In a similar vein, for us, if we are in leadership roles in any area of life, and especially within Christian ministry, we must never be drunk, and we should carefully consider how much we should drink, if any at all - not merely for the impact on ourselves, but the impact on others.

However, we then read:

Proverbs 31:6-7

Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
And wine to those who are bitter of heart.
Let him drink and forget his poverty,
And remember his misery no more.

That is, there are proper uses of alcohol - and especially in the case of those suffering in physical pain, alcohol has historically been used to help. Much like anaesthetics in surgery, or morphine or other drugs are today for those who are dying.

Having addressed her son's relationship to women and alcohol, the final relationship noted is that towards those in need:

Proverbs 31:8-9

Open your mouth for the speechless,
In the cause of all who are appointed to die.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And plead the cause of the poor and needy.

That is, don't just watch out for yourself - but look out for the needs of others.

Now, as we conclude this chapter, and indeed the book of Proverbs, we see the gold standard to seek in a wife. But there are two things we should consider first:

- First, don't caught up in specifics of the time, but rather look for principles. It is not necessary to marry a seamstress, but you should look for someone who is willing to work with their hands!
- Second, we should note that this is a picture of an ideal wife with an ideal husband, both with an ideal walk with God. But rather than rubbish it as impossible or outdated - we should aim for it!

And we start with the last question in the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 31:10

Who can find a virtuous wife?
For her worth is far above rubies.

How true this is! I've certainly experienced this in two halves - first, who can find a virtuous wife?! For it's really hard! I went through over 15 years of singleness as an adult wondering just that.

But second, I can testify that it is absolutely wonderful to have a godly wife. I don't say this out of pride, but out of thankfulness - for God has been very good to me. And if you're a single guy who wants to get married, then I can't stress to you enough how much better it is to wait for a godly woman, than to compromise and marry someone who doesn't love the Lord. In fact it's so much better, that it's better to remain single than to compromise.

Now, should you marry someone who loves the Lord, I hope you'll know this next verse to be true:

Proverbs 31:11

The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
So he will have no lack of gain.

Trust is incredibly important. As is trustworthiness. If you're trying to choose a wife - ask yourself are they reliable? Do they keep their word? Will they honour God above all else?

Proverbs 31:12

She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.

That is, she is kind hearted, exemplifying Christian behaviour.

Proverbs 31:13

She seeks wool and flax,
And willingly works with her hands.

That is, she is not lazy, but diligent. Work is not beneath her. In fact she willingly does it!

Proverbs 31:14

She is like the merchant ships,
She brings her food from afar.

Whether bringing food from Aldi or Tesco. She thinks beyond her own needs.

Proverbs 31:15

She also rises while it is yet night,
And provides food for her household,
And a portion for her maidservants.

So because she was prudent, she can now provide. And is kind to those whom she has help from. Not shouting at the checkout assistant.

Proverbs 31:16

She considers a field and buys it;
From her profits she plants a vineyard.

And here we see that she isn't merely being a dutiful little housewife boxed into doing house-chores. Far from it. Rather, we see she is empowered, she has autonomy, she is entrusted. And has full access to the family finances. No prenups.

Proverbs 31:17

She girds herself with strength,
And strengthens her arms.

She is willing to get on with work + life.

Proverbs 31:18

She perceives that her merchandise is good,
And her lamp does not go out by night.

That is she neither says “that’ll do” for quality. Or “that’ll do” for quantity. She’s not looking to get away doing the bare minimum for her family.

Proverbs 31:19-20

She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hand holds the spindle.
She extends her hand to the poor,
Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not self absorbed, but cares for others. Even selfless, seeing not only to her families needs, but actively seeing how she can help those in need. I tell you, this is a wonderful thing to see in action!

Proverbs 31:21-22

She is not afraid of snow for her household,
For all her household is clothed with scarlet.
She makes tapestry for herself;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.

So rather than being caught off guard, she has given thought to her and her households future needs, she has been prudent and diligent. Does it matter if she is a seamstress? Not at all - but rather it matters that she has given that which costed her time and effort.

Proverbs 31:23

Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.

I get the impression here that her husband is known as the one with the great wife! And wouldn't it be great if every Christian spouse was so Biblically mature, so practically caring, that they were well known for it. That everyone said; “wow, those Christian’s know how to do marriage!”.

Proverbs 31:24

She makes linen garments and sells them,
And supplies sashes for the merchants.

I think we’re seeing here that she is a help, not a hinderance to her husband.

Proverbs 31:25

Strength and honour are her clothing;
She shall rejoice in time to come.

That is, her diligence, prudence, and wisdom will pay off!

Proverbs 31:26

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.

So even her attitude toward others is right. She is not one to be snappy or abrasive. In fact, she points to Christ! Look at what we read in 1 Peter 3:

1 Peter 3:1-6

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Jon Courson notes: “With all of the self-discipline, skills, hard work, and wisdom this woman shows, one could think she would be judgmental of others. On the contrary, however, her speech was characterised by kindness.”

Proverbs 31:27

She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.

She is one who cares for her children, and looks out for them, rather than one who finds them an inconvenience. I find it sad to see so many mums (and dads) more interested in their phone than their children. You know, I never had to walk to school with my Mum while she was on her phone. And I fondly remember conversations all the way there and back.

And as useful a tool as our phones can be today, we'd do well to remember that our phones actually fit in our pocket for a reason - that's where they should spend some of their time! And instead our eyes should watch over the ways our households. I think the same can be aimed for by fathers as well as mothers here.

Proverbs 31:28

Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her:

Given what we've read, this isn't surprising. But let us recognise that this doesn't happen by accident! This a direct result of this wife living as she should. Doing everything she does for God's glory and others benefit. We read:

Proverbs 31:29

"Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all."

I love this verse, for I believe it to be a simple reminder that as husbands, we should be making our wives feel the most special person in the world.

But now for the crunch:

Proverbs 31:30

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

So that is, regardless of how equipped a woman feels her family are for winter, or how prepared their packed lunches are each morning, or regardless of what practical things she can or cannot do, even regardless of whether she is a mother, or regardless of whether she is married – a woman's relationship with God is what defines her.

J Vernon McGee notes: "Young man, first you should look for a wife who is a Christian. Then I hope that you get a good-looking one in the bargain—it's nice to have both together. "A woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised." This is of prime importance."

When a woman fears the Lord, her words, actions and decisions will honour Him, and she will be worthy of the praise she gets as we read in the final verse:

Proverbs 31:31

Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the gates.

Summary

As we look back at this incredible book we may feel a little berated, or rebuked by it. Perhaps convicted too – and really, I hope we all do. For none of us are perfect, and we are so desperately in need of God's wisdom. But we also need the humility to admit that is the case.

Application questions

In applying this to our lives this week, let us consider these questions:

- Is our relationship with God of bigger concern than riches or poverty?
- If parents, are we having the difficult conversations about relationships and drink?
- Are you looking for a godly wife? // Are you a godly wife?

Let's pray.