

Seek Neither Poverty Nor Riches

(Proverbs 30:1-9)

By understanding who we are in relation to who God is, we can understand what matters most.

INTRODUCTION

Last month, I officiated two funerals from the same family. First, the mother, who was 85, went home to be with the Lord unexpectedly. During that time, there was restriction of 10 people that can congregate at a funeral. Very limited family members and friends attended. Then a week later, her daughter, who was five years younger than me, who was staying in a nursing home, contracted COVID-19. She went home to be with the Lord. It was a very sad situation. Funerals cause me to reflect as I ask, “What really matters in life?” About a month ago, Ellie asked, “What if I died from the virus. What would happen?” Again, it caused me to ask, “What really matters in life?”

This morning’s passage addresses a man that is taking a holistic view of life. He was thinking about what matters most in life. He approached God with two requests asking that God would answer them before he dies. If you have two requests, what would you ask God for? What would you want God to help you change? Lord, can you make me smarter? Can you make me more eloquent? Can you make give me a higher paying job? Can you give me better behaved children? Can you provide me a spouse? I am sure there can be many different requests. But the vital question is, “What matters most in life?”

Today, we will look at two requests that the author of Proverbs 30 made to the Lord. But before we get to his two requests, he will give us a glimpse of who he is and how he views who God is. When we truly understand who we are in relation to who God is, then we can understand what matters most. We will then make the right requests. There are three major points to my sermon this morning. First, understand who we are? Second, understand who God is? Third, understand what matters most?

Solomon’s writing ended in Proverbs 29. However, that is not the end of the Book of Proverbs. Chapters 30 and 31 are a separate discourse to the main body of Proverbs. These final two chapters of wisdom were written by Agur and Lemuel. Let us turn to Proverbs 30:1 v. 1, “The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The oracle: This man declared, I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out.” Verse 1 introduces the author, Agur, whom we do not know much about because this is the only place he is mentioned in the Bible. It does states that he is weary and worn out.

A. Understand Who We Are

In verses 2-3, Agur describes who he is, which leads us to the first point of the sermon- Understand who we are. Let’s read vv. 2-3, “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.” Agur acknowledges his frailty.

There are four descriptions recorded here. First, he is stupid. Not many of us would call ourselves stupid. The word stupid gives the understanding of someone with an intellect as dull as an animal. Second, he said that he has not the understanding of a man. What he means is that he doesn’t understand life. Third, he lacks human wisdom as well as lacks knowledge of the Holy One. He claims that he has a lot of limitations. To be wise, one

needs to acknowledge that he does not have wisdom and looks to God for it. Agur either has really poor self-esteem or he is a sincere, humble man. I believe the latter. It is crucial what his posture is like when he stands before the Lord.

ILLUSTRATION: I was talking with a very high executive, with hundreds of people under his authority. I could not believe what he said: "I really do not know what I am doing." He either has a really poor self-esteem or he is a sincere, humble man. I believe it is the latter.

ILLUSTRATION: The older I have gotten, the more I realize how much I do not know. I used to be a young whippersnapper, thinking that I knew everything. But now, I see how limited I am. I have had to eat a lot of humble pie before I have come to this point. I believe when we see ourselves lowly, we have a greater desire to depend on the Lord.

Agur is a humble man, confessing his limitations. (Prov. 15:33) The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor." Jesus teaches the same thing: The first will be last and the last first. If you want to be great, you need to be the servant of all. Therefore, if we really want to know what matters most, we first need to come before God in a humble posture.

APPLICATION: How do you view yourselves? Do you see yourselves as a know-it-all or do we see yourselves as not being that smart after all?

[This leads us to the second section of the sermon that is to understand who God is? There are two sub points here. We come to understand who God is from God's Creation and from God's Word. Let us read vv.4, "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!"]

B. Understand Who God Is

1. From God's Creation

Agur just said at the end of verse 3 that he has not learned the knowledge of the Holy One. But in verse 4, he started asking four rhetorical questions that point to God. Well, surely no human being has gone up to heaven and come back down. No human can gather the wind in his hands. No human created the world. The only possible person that could be referred to is God, the creator of the universe.

Although Agur did not know the Holy One, yet deep inside there is a desire to know the Him. He was seeking after God. The Bible said that if we seek Him, we will find. From looking at creation, he could sense that there had to be a supreme designer that created the universe. Although he considered himself to be uneducated, unwise, and untaught in truth, he recognized the wonder of creation. He was crying out for someone to answer him as he asked, "What is his name? God reveals himself to Agur by General Revelation. God has made Himself known to every human being through nature.

From (Romans 1:19-20), we are told that we are without excuse in knowing that there is a supreme designer that created the universe. It says, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his

eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” The world just did not come into being by chance. From looking at the complexity of the universe, there has to be a master designer.

ILLUSTRATION: When we look at the universe a little more closely, we will see how small we are in relation to the grand majestic creation of God. In 1990, the Voyager was sent out to take pictures of the solar system, traveling at 40,000 miles/hour as it headed away from the sun. 30 years later, it has surpassed Pluto, which is the last of nine planets in our solar system. That is far away from earth. The Milky Way is the galaxy that the solar system is in. However, if we were to compare the solar system in relation to our galaxy, it is like a size of a quarter in the area of North America, which includes the United States and Canada. Could you imagine if you needed to find that quarter? The Earth is like a dot in relation to the solar system. The solar system is like a dot in relation to the galaxy. The Milky Way, which is the galaxy that we are in, is only one of billions of galaxies in the universe. I am reminded of Job 37:14, “Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God.” Oh, my goodness. How vast, grand and overwhelming is God’s creation. We can come to understand who God is from His creation.

We step back and see the grandeur of God’s creation. We are just a speck, a peon, one of 7.5 billion people. We appear to be so insignificant. However, the Bible says that God, the creator of the universe, loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. He has given us choice and we have chosen to rebel against God. Sin entered into this world. Since man cannot save himself, God sent His only begotten son to die in our place to pay the penalty of our sin so that we could be redeemed. Not only did Jesus die, but he rose from the dead showing that God had accepted what He did on our behalf. If we place our faith in Jesus, then we will be saved and become a child of God. It is not because of who I am, but because of what God has done. It is not because of what I have done, but because of who God is. God valued you and me so much that Jesus died for me.

In Psalms 19:1, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Through the creation of the universe, man is without excuse in knowing that there is a creator.

The last two questions from Agur: “What is his name, and the name of his son?” The answer is clearly God. Agur does not know the identification of his son. However, we do know that it refers to Jesus, the Son of God, who came down from heaven and ascended back to heaven after the resurrection. Jesus answered Nicodemus in John 3:13, “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”

[Agur has come to understand who God is from God’s Creation and in verses 5-6, he has come to understand who God is from God’s Word. Let us read vv.5-6, “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.”]

2. From God’s Word (30:5-6)

Agur recognizes that God’s Word is true; that word “true” literally means pure. This word used of metals that were refined- tested by fire. When God’s Word is tested, it is proven to be true or authoritative. It is through God’s Word that we will come to know God more personally. We can accept it as truth without errors.

Agur has experienced God personally as he sees God as a shield. This is a wonderful metaphor of God as a protector over those who place their dependence on Him. God will protect all those who trust in Him. We have to take the initiative to take refuge in Him. When we do so, then we can be assured of being safe.

ILLUSTRATION: At the Father/Son Retreat last year. There was an archery game, where the fathers went against the middle school sons. They shot arrows with cushions on the tips. There were barriers one can get behind as a shield to protect them from being hit. As long as the players take refuge behind that shield, they are safe. God is our shield when we take refuge in Him.

Because God's Word is true, Agur warns those that tamper with it by adding to it. They will be severely judged. God's Word is a reflection of who God is. God also makes similar warning in (Rev. 22:18-19), "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

God has revealed general revelation about Himself through creation and specific revelation about Himself through His Holy Word. General revelation enables us to know that there is a God, who is the master designer, but it is not sufficient to save us. The special revelation of God's Word is necessary to point us to the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross, which provides us with salvation.

[Because of the relationship that Agur has toward God, he can confidently ask two critical requests before he dies: Two things that matter most in life. We come to the third point of the sermon: Understand What Matters Most. Let us read vv. 7-8, "Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me."]

C. Understand What Matters Most

Before one can truly understand what matters most, we need to have a proper understanding of who we are and who God is. Because Agur comes in a humble posture before the Lord and recognizes His authority and power, Agur is able to go before the Lord with requests of what matters most. It shows what priorities Agur had in his life because he has a proper view of himself and of God. The writer realizes his weaknesses and he turns to the Lord to help him deal with them before he dies. He sees the bigger picture of life and understands what matters most. The first request is asking for integrity.

1. The Requests

a. Integrity

Agur asks God to remove all dishonesty and lying from him. He wants to be a man of character, who lives by integrity. The more Agur learns from God's Word which is truth, the more he does not want anything to deal with falsehood. This might be an area of weaknesses of Agur, where he is tempted to lie.

APPL: Various times when we see our peers using white lies to get their ways. We feel justified to do likewise. Plus, we think, a small lie would not hurt anyone.

Others are advancing because they are not telling the truth. They fudge some of the information to get ahead. We might feel that we will get the short end of the stick if we do not lie also. “Some of my classmates are cheating and if I do not cheat, they are going to get in front of me.” One of the things that matter in life is integrity. Character is more important than position. Honesty is the hallmark of life. Integrity will last.

[The second request is recorded in the second half of verse 8. “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me.” In short, Agur is petitioning for contentment.]

b. Contentment

He asked God to provide what he needed. He realized that if he has too much, he would forget the Lord and would depend upon himself. Agur understood the power of greed. Too often money controls us instead of us controlling money. Money in itself is neutral, it is neither good nor bad. If we are not careful, we would want more because we have been deceived by lies that the more we have, the happier we will be.

We do not hear about contentment taught very frequently, but I believe it is one of the most important biblical principles. In 1 Tim. 6:6, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Godliness is seeking to be conformed to God’s standards. The Bible says, Godliness with contentment will assure you great gain or success. Very few people have learned to be content because we have been deceived by another lie: “Your net worth determines your real worth.” As a result, we strive to have more and more. True contentment lies in our relationship with God. It is believing that God is enough for us to have a meaningful life.

Seek neither poverty nor riches. May we be satisfied with what we have, which is to be content with what we have. The second half of 1 Timothy 6 addresses the principle of contentment. In 1 Tim. 6:17-18, it gives us some practical advice as to how to be satisfied with what we have. “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.” Money can be an idol, where we put our hope in. Unfortunately, it is uncertain. We have seen the stock market plummet last March.

In (Mt. 6:24), “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” When money is our idol, we get obsessed in wanting more because we have been deceived by the world. We focus on ourselves and cling more tightly to what we have because it has become our idol. However, if we understand that God has entrusted possessions to us to manage. And we learn to be content when we move away from focusing on ourselves to focusing on others. May we be rich in good deeds and be generous and ready to share.

ILLUSTRATION: I have been amazed to see some of our members being generous to help others. One of our members, Jonathan Ting has come down with nasal cancer and needing a large amount of money to start his proton treatment. Brothers and

sisters gave generous to cover his cost within a few days. When we can share freely, it unlock the chains that can cause us to be slaves to money. Instead of holding what we have tightly, we have an opened hand policy. It is yours God, may it be used to please you.

APPLICATION: Today, I want to inform you of an opportunity to help the poor. In our country, the government has stepped up to help those that are greatly affected by the COVID-19. However, in 3rd world countries, who are very poor, like Myanmar and Laos, people do not have means to deal with the pandemic. HCC has partnered with Christian National Evangelical Commission to provide love gift packages for the poor in Third World countries. Each package contains rice, oil food items, soaps and vitamins. It cost \$22 per package. May we be willing to share generously with those that do not have much. You can gather more information in the announcement.

[From the third point: Understand what matters most. Agur provides two requests as explained in vv.7-8. In verses 9, it provides the reasons why Agur does not want either extremes of poverty and wealth. Each extreme has its danger. Let us read v.9, “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.”]

2. The Reasons

The reason why he does not want to be rich is because it will cause Agur to be proud. He would deny that his wealth is from the Lord, but claim it comes from his personal abilities and smartness. It is easy to be independent from God and not need Him. He would have a self-sufficient attitude. This is one of the ways that Satan uses to redirect us away from the Lord. Instead of being grateful to the Lord, we believe the lie that states that we do not need God.

On the other hand, if he lives in poverty, then he is tempted to steal. We are tempted to steal by cheating on our tax return, misuse petty cash, and take money off our parent’s dresser. These actions will dishonor God. That is the last thing that Agur wants to do because He has a high view of God. He just wanted enough to satisfy his need. When we are dishonest, we profane the name of God. We believe the lie that God doesn’t care about us and will not provide for us. But what matters most as we study from this passage is to pursue integrity and contentment.

We will not come to these priorities of what matters most until we truly understand who we are and understand who God is. May we humble ourselves before God acknowledging that we are not that smart and we need Him. At the same time, we understand who God is from God’s creation and from God’s Word. He is the creator of the universe and He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. By understanding who we are in relation to who God is, we can understand what matters most.