

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 19

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session 19, Wisdom from the Natural World, Proverbs 30:18-33.

Welcome to a chat on the book of Proverbs.

The section of Proverbs that we are looking at today is one of the most unique in the book in that it deals with what we call numerical sayings. That is, there are three things and there are four. And what happens in this section is that something from the natural world is compared to something within society and its order.

Now, as we have observed, Proverbs have done that quite regularly all the way through. But here they do it with a different kind of pattern, the 3-4 pattern, and with very specific objectives within each one of the three and the four. So, as we come to the appendix of the book of Proverbs, its conclusion, after these words of the one who is pure, or Agur, the son of Yaka, as we have just observed them, we come to sayings of three things and four.

The first of those is here in chapter 30, verses 18 to 20, where what we read, there are three things that are too mysterious for me. There are four that I do not understand. The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake upon a rock, the way of a ship in the sea, and the way of a man with a maiden.

Now, that really is rather interesting. What kind of comparison is there between a ship, an eagle, and a snake, and the human relationship of a man and a woman? What sort of analogy are we supposed to be drawing from this? Well, obviously, there are various ways in which this could be taken. But I would just like to point out something that is important to the center point of what is being compared.

It is the word that is very, very common in the book of Proverbs, and in other wisdom sayings. It is the Hebrew word *derek*, which we have translated as way, but which means something like a path. And so, we have this, for example, in Psalm chapter one.

The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. There are two ways. This way is a metaphor for how we live our lives.

What is our conduct like? But now here, the focus is rather specific. The focus is on how we conduct ourselves in relationships with the opposite sex, particularly a man with a maiden, and just what aspect of that relationship might be in view. I suppose that the first thing we need to do in this kind of situation is to ask ourselves, well,

when it comes to the way or the path, what is the similarity between the eagle and the snake and the ship? How are those three similar? Because of course, in most ways, they aren't similar at all.

But how they are similar has got to focus on this word path or way. Now, if we compare that to ourselves as humans, when we want to go somewhere, we generally look for the path or the road, because that's going to be the means by which our walking or our movement or our journey is facilitated. We stay on the way, on the right road.

This has been the metaphor for Proverbs all the way through. Stay on the road, stay on the way, make it the straight way, don't go wandering off this way or that. But what is the way or the road or the path for a snake or for a ship or for an eagle? Well, actually, in all three of those cases, there's no path.

The eagle can fly wherever it wants to fly. The snake travels wherever it wants to go. The ship maneuvers its way through the sea according to the winds and according to the navigation of the stars.

But it doesn't have anything to do with a road or a path that you can see. And so somewhere here is the relationship, is an analogy to the relationship between the chemistry, the magnetism that there is between the sexes. I always find this interesting.

In fact, I think that the expression is sometimes used, they have chemistry or they don't have chemistry. Now, that's kind of a curious metaphor in itself, chemistry, chemistry. That's what I do in a lab.

That's why I have test tubes. That's what I'm checking out for what reaction there are between minerals and so forth. What's that got to do with my relationship with a girl or a woman? What do you mean I've got chemistry or I don't have chemistry? Well, somehow or another, we do know what that means.

It's a picture, it's a metaphor for what happens when you put two different kinds of chemicals together. You put two different kinds of chemicals together and you may get an explosion. Or you may put two different other kinds of chemicals together and you'll produce something that's a very useful new combination.

It might be for food, it might be to improve some kind of formula that we use, either in the machine or on our bodies or anything else. So that's chemistry. It makes things smooth and makes things better or it makes things blow up.

And somewhere there's an analogy to how we are with people. There's just this attraction. And why is there an attraction? I can tell you perfectly well that I have

observed some relationships and people where I say, my, it would not do well for me to try to be married to that person.

This would not work. Did I know who I was marrying when I got married? Well, no, actually I didn't. I took a chance.

But in my case, it was a pretty good chance. At least I was blessed by God. And the chemistry worked out pretty well.

Of course, no, no chemistry is everything you want it to be, but it's pretty good. Now, this could, of course, pertain just to the sexual relationships themselves. Part of the whole point here is that you don't know what a person's sexual history is.

You don't know what's gone on in their past. You don't know any of these things. So, you can apply this metaphor in various and different ways.

But in this case, the book of Proverbs does not give you the option to do that. As a matter of fact, what it says is, this is the way of the adulterous woman. Now, here is a particular case.

We're not just talking about a promiscuous woman, but we're talking about an adulterous woman. This woman has said that she's going to be committed to this man and to this marriage. But she thinks it isn't going to matter if she is not.

So, this might be the way that she should go, but she says, no, no, there's no just one way. We can choose whatever way that we want to. And unfortunately, in circles of faith and even in Christian circles, we hear of people with these strange sorts of ideas of what sexual relationships can be, and that whatever marriage is, they can go this way or that way in relation to other kinds of intimacy, and it isn't going to matter.

This proverb is saying, well, that's not quite the case. The adulterous woman thinks she thinks that this way is like a ship or a snake or an eagle, and it's undefined. And she wipes her mouth, and she says, nothing wrong with that.

But of course, what the whole numerical saying is illustrating is the way in which this kind of thinking is wrong. There is a way. There is a way.

There is a path, and it's not as open and free as the way of an eagle or a snake or a ship in their path. Disruptions to society. Yes, these happen.

The wrong person can be the one that is in charge. The ruler may be displaced by someone who should be serving him. Sometimes, fools seem to live prosperously and with no accountability.

Sometimes, the contentious servant comes to rule the household. Sometimes, the servant girl comes to disinherit the mistress. This, of course, is something along the lines of Sarah's fear when Hagar has a child for Abraham.

Because, of course, if Hagar is part of the family, and Hagar is the only one who has a child, then, of course, that family is going to come to displace her household and her family because she has no children. And so, Abraham says, well, okay, we'll solve that problem. We'll send Hagar away so that she can't disinherit us.

But, of course, that wasn't a very good solution to the problem. In that instance, though Abraham attempted to provide for Hagar, he didn't do it very successfully. And we know the story of the hostility that resulted from it.

But, on the general rule, it is wrong that the person who is the rightful heir of the property should come to be displaced. What we also need to, what there also may be, as we have it here in Proverbs 33.24, is the way in which we use our skills for things in the earth that are small, but they are very, very wise. How do the vulnerable and how do the wise, how do the vulnerable and how do the small things survive? Well, by their skills.

And this is very interesting. So, you feel disadvantaged. So, you feel that everybody can capitalize on your weakness.

Well, think about the ants. They're not very strong, but they always survive. And how do they survive? Well, they know when they need to gather their food, and they all go about doing it.

And they will always be there. The rock badger. This is a smallish animal, very vulnerable to predators.

But it's one that's found, especially in the Middle East. And they find their security in the rocks and in the small holes. I don't have familiarity with that kind of an animal.

I know the badgers that dig their way into the ground, usually in search of food. But the example here is how they survive because they know where to go, where they can stay out of the way of the predator. The grasshoppers.

We've already referred to that. They may be creatures that look pretty inept. And yet, somehow or another, in great masses, they can literally simply clean away fields.

And I have actually seen that happen. And they just flow in a massive number, clean out the field till there's nothing green left, and all move out. Nobody hurts the other and moves to another field, clean that one out.

And by that time, there's twice as many of them. And they keep on going. They have their ways.

Spiders. Whatever actual animal this is, is no longer identifiable, a lizard or whatever it is. But you find them everywhere.

And I don't know how it is that these spider webs can show up in my office, in my house. I think that it's a pretty, you know, it's a pretty well-insulated place. I try to keep all the cold winds out.

But all of a sudden, there's a cobweb. Where did that come from? How did it get there? I don't know. They have their ways.

And so, the whole point of these three and four small things here is that we needn't be discouraged. And we shouldn't be discouraged if we feel that we are vulnerable and that we are weak. How we perceive ourselves.

The Bible has the Proverbs here have many, many warnings about pride. And the way in which pride comes before the fall. But at the same time, there needs to be a certain kind of confidence.

And that's what the four, three, and four things are about here. There are three things that are stately in their stride. There are four things that walk with dignity.

So just because we may be of a humble level in society does not mean that we should in any sense compromise our own personal dignity. We compromise our own personal dignity when we become arrogant when we become greedy when we start to do these things in which we act like a fool. But we shouldn't compromise our dignity just because someone thinks we aren't important, just because we don't seem to have very much of a status.

And so here is different examples of those kinds of creatures that have this sort of dignity. Now, the lion is the king of beasts. And of course, when you see a lion and you see it striding, you have an understanding of why it becomes the symbol of strength.

But I'm always reminded of another little parable, a mashal, that someone gave me. The lion was feeling a little insecure. And he went up to the elephant.

And he said to the elephant, who is the king of beasts? The elephant wrapped his trunk around the lion picked him up and slammed him on the ground three or four times and then stomped off. And the lion said, well, just because you don't know the answer, you don't have to get so mad about it. Yeah, the lion isn't the strongest of beasts at all times.

But somehow or another, the lion always carries this dignity. The cock or the male goat, we don't know if this animal really is the cock or not. But it certainly pertains to me.

You know, I grew up with chickens. I grew up with feeding chickens and cleaning the barn after chickens. And I grew up eating chicken eggs.

And I grew up eating chickens. But what was always striking to me was the cock or the rooster. My goodness, you needed only one of them in the henhouse, but you always knew where he was.

His head was straight up and he was strutting around. And he's in charge of every other chick that's in here. It doesn't matter how many there are.

I don't know why cocks feel that way. But they do. They do seem to play the part.

They have confidence. A king. Well, a king may in fact have authority.

He may be strong in his rule. There is a place where we need to be assured because we are human, we have dignity before God. Because we are human, we have a value before God.

And it doesn't matter what our place in society. Flaunt it and you're arrogant. But live it and you can be the person that you want to be.

This last numerical proverb here is really interesting to me because it talks about arrogance and schemes that are dangerous, which is rather appropriate right after you've talked about self-confidence. There's a difference between self-confidence and arrogance. These four things all operate around the term squeeze.

Now, that doesn't work well in translation, but in Hebrew, it's always the same word. It's the word mitz. And so, if you pound cream, and I've done lots of that, what you'll get is butter.

And if you punch someone in the nose, what you're going to get is a nosebleed. And then what you're going to get is anger. And of course, the Hebrew word for nose, for anger, is also nose.

You get hot at the end of your nose. And so when you churn cream, you get butter. When you twist the nose, you get blood.

And when you twist the nose, you get a fight. So, it's kind of an interesting play on all of these words. But all of it is to come around to this whole business of people who make trouble, and they make trouble with this squeezing, with this stirring.

Well, there's a little sample of the way ancients used numbers three and four in order to bring a cluster of things together and make a particular point about a whole variety of different kinds of things that really make their point well.

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