

LITTLE BUT WISE

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." Proverbs 6:6-8.

When God created man He endowed him with capacities for work. Work is one of God's merciful provisions for man. There was an element of mercy in the judgment wherein God provided that man must work for his daily bread, because idleness contributes so much to his physical, mental and moral deterioration. Satan cannot beguile and degrade a busy person nearly so quickly or so easily as he can an idle one. Work is essential to the welfare of mankind. Man must work if he is to eat properly, grow strong and develop the powers which God has given him. Work is necessary for a wholesome, happy, successful and useful life. Truly it has a beneficent ministry.

Many do their utmost to keep from working and earning an honest living. Such conduct is highly displeasing to God. In His Word He highly commends industrious and diligent workers, but He also excoriates laziness in blistering terms. No man has the right to take anything from society without giving an equivalent in return, but multitudes regard work as undignified, unbecoming and degrading.

To the habitually lazy, who seek a life of ease and want to live in idleness, our text speaks in strong terms. To all such God says, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise."

The ant is a very small, insignificant, crawling insect. There is nothing attractive about the appearance of this tiny creature. It is not like the bird with its beautiful plumage, not like the deer in its gracefulness and not like the lion in its strength. This little insect is exceedingly industrious. One simply cannot watch it long without being impressed by its industry, thrift and hard work. It is constantly busy in caring for its present needs or in providing for its future ones. God used this small creature of earth to illustrate the tremendous importance of being a worker.

God's Word bids us to consider the heavens, but here it commands us to consider the ant which acts by instinct. This tiny insect instructs us not by speech, but by actions. Therefore, we are urged to "consider her ways," that is, how she is employed and for what ends she is active. From the ant we are to acquire the wisdom of acting suitably to our superior nature and our glorious hopes. What are some of the valuable lessons which we can learn from the ant?

I. Industriousness.

The ant is presented in this passage as a pattern or example in this matter of being industrious. Every ant in the nest, except the ones that are extremely young, has something to do and is busy doing it all day long. Each ant always tries to do as much work as it can. Sir John Lubbock, who has studied ants thoroughly, said that he watched a certain ant from six o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night, and observed that it was at work all of the time. In that period of time this one ant carried 185 loads into the nest. Ants are very industrious. They travel in processions, one line coming out of the nest empty, and

another line going into the nest loaded. As they meet, those without loads salute those carrying burdens.

Industriousness is an important lesson for us to learn from the little ant. It teaches us to be industrious, busy at something in the home, in the church, in the community and in the world. The industry of the ant is a rebuke to the sluggard. The amount of work done by this small insect ought to be enough to shame an indolent man into activity. Man should apply himself industriously in keeping with the plan of God for his life. Work is ordained of God and is essential for a sense of well-being. It is also necessary for one to earn his livelihood and make a worthy contribution to his generation.

Work adds dignity and respect to life. God works, Christ works, and God's plan is that all able-bodied people shall work. Our forefathers knew the value of work. There is no substitute for work. One of the things which is wrong with the quiz shows on television is the idea of getting rich quick by winning something for nothing. The result has been that many winners of easy money wished they had had no part in it.

The person who works hard will succeed. History is replete with examples. Countless Americans have risen to prominence from low in the ranks. In his youth Benjamin Franklin read Proverbs 22:29: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men," practiced its precept, and remembered it when he stood before the kings of Europe as an ambassador of the United States. Of course, not every one can hobnob with kings or become a millionaire. But, like honesty, hard work pays. Neither honesty nor hard work may pay as quickly as some other activities, but the rewards are more satisfying and more lasting.

A wise man realizes that the field must be cultivated or the weeds will take it. Business must be attended to or bankruptcy ensues. Honest toil is necessary if a man does not want to suffer the loss of self-respect or the pangs of hunger. Some people are content for the government or some charitable organization to supply their needs. Many want to go through life drawing benefits but dodging work. But it is a law of life that man must provide his own necessities. These are not given us for the mere asking. Self-respect should prevent a man from depending on others to supply his needs. An industrious person can maintain his self-respect, enjoy the fruits of his own labor and experience the thrill of achieving.

Idleness is a sin. It is wrong for one to live on the labors of others and do nothing. Idleness produces other sins. Spurgeon said, "An idle man makes himself a target for the devil; and the devil is an uncommonly good shot." Idleness brings various miseries upon people. All should remember that they must give an account for their failure to work. What a pity that we have so many idlers in the vineyard of the Lord!

II. Helpfulness.

Ants help one another. If an ant is injured away from the nest, other ants come along and take it back to the nest and care for it until it recovers or dies. Sir John Lubbock related how he pinned down a large fly about six feet from an ant's nest and then watched to see what would happen. An ant came along, found the fly and tried to move it but could not. Immediately she went back to the nest and in less than a

minute returned with seven other ants. When an ant finds something good to eat no time is lost in rushing back to the nest with the news and returning with many other ants in order that they may share the food with one another.

III. Cooperation.

Ants are social insects in that they live in colonies, mingle with one another and work together. Ordinarily their nests are excavated underground, but some species of ants make them in mounds above the ground and to a considerable height. They do not have an overseer, ruler or guide to tell them or to show them what to do. Because of the commendable manner in which they live and work together, these small and unattractive insects set for us a splendid and beautiful example in cooperation. Through cooperation they carry out numerous and difficult enterprises. If one of them finds a morsel of food which is beyond her power to move, she quickly summons others to assist her.

IV. Perseverance.

We ought never to despise the humble ant which can teach us perseverance in spite of difficulties. An ant always finds a way out of difficulties without becoming discouraged or giving up. If an obstacle is put in the way of ants, they try to get over it or around it. If they are caught in a trap of some sort, they at once try to find a way out and back to their home.

An experimenter with ants wanted to see what they would do if their road up a tree was cut off. So he spread a band soaked in tobacco juice, which ants do not like, at the foot of the tree. The ants coming down the tree would not cross the band at any point. After awhile they dropped from the boughs to the ground. When those going up came to the band they did not know what to do at first, so they retreated. Soon he saw them coming back with little pieces of dirt in their mouths, and before long they had built a dirt road across the band and were streaming up and down the tree as busy as ever. Ants keep on at their tasks.

Anyone who has watched an ant struggling with a heavy load may well be rebuked by the patience and perseverance of the little insect. If the ant-hill is destroyed, the ants soon set to work and reduce the chaos to order again. Seemingly the ants never get discouraged by any difficulties which they encounter. Perseverance often conquers when all else fails.

V. Preparation.

Ants are constantly busy in caring for their present needs and in providing for their future ones. With only the instinct of nature to prompt them, and without an overseer, ruler or guide to tell or to show them what to do, they diligently gather and store food for the time of need without being forced to do so. Some critics of the Bible have delighted in denying that the ant stores up winter provision in time of harvest. These critics arrived at this conclusion because of their limited observation of ants, and without knowing that there are actually about two thousand varieties of ants, with greatly varying habits. The harvester ants lay up stores of food for winter. Storing up good things

for the future is the thing for which the ants mentioned in our text are noted. They certainly show wisdom in doing that. Crickets chirp away all their time in the summer and when winter comes they have nothing and die of starvation, but the ants are too smart for that. They busily gather food when it is available and store it for the time when none is to be found. These extra supplies keep them in the times of need.

Storing up in summer for winter use is a mark of wisdom. The ant's care in embracing present opportunities is a strong rebuke to those who will put off until tomorrow what, perhaps, can only be done today. Our Lord said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Each person must do his own work in the world. Each one has responsibilities of his own which can never be discharged by proxy. As the ant gathereth in summer the food on which it is to live in winter, so every child of God in a time of quietness should gather out of God's Word that on which he may live spiritually in time of adversity and trouble.

That which the ant does instinctively, and without any intelligent guide or instructor, we ought to do, inasmuch as we are endowed with reason, have so many human teachers and friends to instruct and direct us and have the admonitions of the Lord to enlighten, quicken and prompt us. Men who care only for the passing moment are shallow and weak.

Every life has a summer and a winter. The winter of life is fast approaching. Are we making all of the necessary preparation? How foolish are those who make elaborate provision for time but fail to prepare for eternity.