

The Wisdom of Rock Badgers
July 25, 2010 - Proverbs 30:24-25

What do the following people have in common?

A child is bitten by an animal

A lady gets burned by a stove fire in her home

A parent receives a phone call from the vice-principal about their child's behavior.

A young woman gets dumped by her boyfriend for another girl

A worker gets called into the manager's office along with a representative from human resources.

Each person's security is suddenly disturbed. If you got bit by an animal when you were a child, you probably remember it. Some people have a lifelong fear of dogs because they got bit as a child. I remember petting some Siamese cats on a neighbor's porch when I was about 6. One of the cats didn't like it so she sunk her fangs right into the fleshy part between thumb and first finger. I ran home howling as I looked at the holes and the blood on my hand. I claimed the cat tore my thumb off my hand. But my mother was able to calm those fears and treat the bite before going on a cat hunt. But that bite

threatened my security. I know someone who tried to put out a stove fire in their home. But it caught her robe and burned her. She was in shock for a few days. A parent receiving a call from the vice principal, a break up in a relationship and a lay off or firing can seriously disrupt our security.

Security is safety, protection and a sense of peace. It is one of our basic needs. So where do we turn for security? What helps you feel secure? A rainy day fund? Good health? Everything going well? Your own skill, wisdom and resources? Things working well? Doors locked? Being in control of the situation?

Sometimes, we may have some or a lot of those things in place. But rainy day funds get drained; good health comes and goes and goes and comes. Everything doesn't always go well. You might come to the end of your own skill, wisdom and resources. Things may not work well. We are often not in control of the situation. Then come animal bites, house fires, vice-principal phone calls, dumpings, layoffs, car accidents, serious illnesses and death.

So how do we live in this real world? Do we desperately struggle to find, keep and control security? Do we shrink back and not

try anything for fear that we might disrupt the safe zone? Or is there a middle ground?

Well, today God and His Word have good news for us about his security question. It's another piece of wisdom from his little creatures. **God's vulnerable rock badgers point us to the Rock.** Rock Badgers have something to teach us about finding security in our often insecure world.

Last week, we began a study from Proverbs. We learned that Proverbs contains God's wisdom directed through various people. Most Proverbs were spoken or written by King Solomon. But Proverbs 30 contains the sayings of a non-Israelite guy named Agur. We saw Agur honestly seek and search for wisdom from the Holy One.

Now we're focusing on one collection of his sayings called a numerical saying. It starts with a number – Four. It's like the speaker intends to prove his point in four different ways. The phrase introducing the sayings goes like this – “Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise.” So he wants us to notice the smallness of the creature. People in the ancient world equated

smallness with insignificance or unimportance. Some people still do that today. How can something be small yet wise? And not only wise but extremely wise?

Last week, we saw God's wisdom displayed through the ants. They are creatures of little strength, yet they store their food in the summer. In other words, they know what time it is and live accordingly. Today, we will meet an animal unfamiliar to most of us. Yet I think you'll like them and especially appreciate God's wisdom displayed through them. So today we aim to discover the wisdom of rock badgers and how this applies to our lives. Then we'll have some time to respond to what God might say to us through this time.

Proverbs 30:24-28 (ESV)

24 Four things on earth are small,
but they are exceedingly wise:
25 the ants are a people not strong,
yet they provide their food in the summer;
26 the rock badgers are a people not mighty,
yet they make their homes in the cliffs;
27 the locusts have no king,
yet all of them march in rank;
28 the lizard you can take in your hands,
yet it is in kings' palaces.

God's vulnerable rock badgers point us to The Rock.

What is a rock badger?

Well, the rock badger is part of the hyrax family. Not high tax, but hyrax. It's kind of like a rabbit but bigger. It is only found in Africa and parts of the Middle East today. You can see from the pictures that it's a small, tailless, rodent like animal with a long body and stout legs. They grow to be 44-54 cm or 18-22 inches long. They weigh between 2 and 5 kilograms or 4-12 pounds. They feed mainly on grass and shrubs. They have a wide mouth and sharp teeth so they can take large bites of grass and quickly fill their stomachs. Eating rapidly and spending less time in open grazing land lessens their exposure to predators. Bible Translations name them coney, hyraxes, shephans, and badgers.

Now why are these rock badgers creatures of little strength like Agur describes? Well they don't have strength to fight off predators. In fact they are a food source for many other animals larger than themselves like leopards, eagles, mongooses, lions and jackals. The African Black Eagle feeds almost exclusively on them. So if it comes down to rock badger versus leopard or rock badger versus Black Eagle, the rock badger will lose every time. They are a "people" not mighty or a creature of little power.

So how do they survive? They live among the rocks. The rocks provide some protection. Even when they are cornered by an eagle or lion, they can push themselves deep into a rock face so they can't be caught. On top of that, they have a unique feature on their foot. They can retract the center portion of their foot into a concave or curled-in dome. This creates a vacuum like a suction cup with their feet. So they can climb steep rock surfaces where some of the predators can't make it.

So with all that in mind, we can discover God's wisdom displayed through the rock badgers. **Rock badgers have little strength but know their security lies in the rocks.** They know where their safety lies. They know they can't wander far from the rocks or they will be easy prey. They scurry out for food and scurry back to the safety of the rocks. They survive because the rocks protect them.

The application to our own lives becomes a little clearer. **We must acknowledge that we have little strength but rejoice that we can find security in and on The Rock.** That Rock is God Himself. The image of God as a Rock has encouraged and comforted God's

people for thousands of years. In Psalm 18, David likens God to his rock. Listen to some of the phrases He uses.

- Psalm 18:1-2 – “I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my **rock** and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my **rock**, in whom I take refuge.
- 18:31 - For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a **rock**, except our God?
- 18:46 - The Lord lives, and blessed be my **rock**, and exalted be the God of my salvation.

Then in Psalm 19, David concludes that Psalm with these words. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my **rock** and my redeemer.

- Psalm 31:3 - For you are my **rock** and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me.
- Psalm 62:2b-3a - Lead me to a **rock** that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Then this rock image is taken and applied to Jesus in the New Testament not just for security for foundation. Some of you may remember Romans 9:30-33 in our recent study. The Apostle Paul explains why so many people, both Jews and Gentiles rejected Jesus.

³⁰What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;³¹but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. ³²Why not?

Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling **stone**." ³³As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a **stone** that causes men to stumble and a **rock** that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

We talked about the stumbling stone image. God described Himself as the stumbling stone back in Isaiah. The prophet foretells how the Assyrian invasion will sweep over the land of Israel like the waters of a great flood. But there will be one place of refuge from the overwhelming water: God himself will prove to be a “sanctuary,” a rock on which they will stand secure. It was like He would be the rock in the middle of the torrent of invasion. So anyone who turned to God through this invasion would find security in Him. But those who put their confidence in other powers or resources will be swept by the flood against this rock and come to grief upon it. To them, far from being a place of refuge, it will prove a dangerous obstacle – “a stone of offence and stumbling.” Those who turn to the rock for refuge would be saved.

This describes Jesus’ effect on people. The Gospel message comes through the stone Jesus that either trips you or supports you. He’s either the rock on which people build their lives or the rock who they stumble over.

Another major passage where Jesus is described as a rock is 1

Peter 2:4-10.

⁴As you come to him, the **living Stone**—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵you also, like **living stones**, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.⁶For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a **stone** in Zion,
a chosen and precious **cornerstone**,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."⁷

Now to you who believe, this **stone** is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The **stone** the builders rejected
has become the **capstone**,"⁸ and,

"A **stone** that causes men to stumble
and a **rock** that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So do you see how God's people have described God and run to Him as their Rock? He is our strength, your fortress, our deliverer, strong tower and refuge. Jesus is either our stumbling stone or the

cornerstone. So, I ask the question again, when something comes along that threatens or unsettles your security in life, where do you turn? Will we turn to God, our Rock? How do we do that?

How to find security in and on The Rock.

1) Receive the rock – Jesus Christ. (Romans 9:30-33) For us to receive, find and live in the security of God the Rock, we must first

receive Jesus as the only one who can bring salvation. It comes down to where we are at with Jesus. It's only through Him that we come to God the rock. So you need to ask yourself what kind of stone is Jesus' in my life? Is He a stumbling stone, a rock of offense or the rock on which you will build your life and never be put to shame? You can't just walk around Jesus, the stone in the path. You either build your life on Him or stumble over Him.

2) Admit you have little strength. (Humble yourself before Him).

Just like rock badgers who have little strength in themselves, we have little strength in ourselves. Now we might find that offensive if we have lots of energy, capability, physical and mental strength. But our levels of strength are incredibly vulnerable. How strong do we feel the next day if we have a sleep disturbed night? One little bug in our system and we can be laid up in bed. As I approach the completion of my 5th decade, I am realizing the limitations of my strength. Oh, I can do okay if I get good sleep, eat a well balanced diet and have little or no frustration in my life. But just alter one of those factors and my strength can be compromised.

Then add to that the crazy choice I made agreeing to become a Christian and a pastor. Now my struggle is not against other humans but against rulers, authorities, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Compared to them, I have little strength. I once heard a pastor accurately describe his reality. He said, “I hear people talking about how ‘the devil tempted them.’ Well, I don’t think the devil has to pay me much attention. He could just send a junior demon down to trip me up and I’d be an easy target.” I agree. On my own I am weak and vulnerable especially spiritually. I am a creature with little strength.

If you have trouble admitting that, then you’re in deeper trouble than me. You are somehow blinded to your vulnerability. Either you’re high on yourself or your physically strong or very capable at something or are used to getting your way. Though all of these can be great blessings to enjoy, they can blind us to our overall strength picture. Compared to the spiritual forces of evil, we have little strength.

Perhaps one of the best ways to come face to face with the reality of our “little strength” is to consider the magnitude of our own sin. I listened this past week to a message on teaching children to love those

different from themselves. It’s easy to like someone who’s like us. But how do we love those different from us? One way was to “teach children that their own sin is uglier than anybody they think is unattractive.” So you know that little boy from Edmonton who had that huge growth on his face? He’s now had 99% of it surgically removed. Before it was removed, he was physically unattractive. But that growth is nothing in ugliness compared to our own sin. When we catch a glimpse of the depth and ugliness of our own sin, and how deep a hold it has on us, we might begin to understand “our little strength.”

3) Build your life On the Rock – Matthew 7:24-27 How do we actually do that? Well part of it is coming to the Lord in prayer and acknowledging our dependence on Him. Part involves asking the Holy Spirit for His empowering and strength each day to overcome sin’s power. And Jesus shows us how in a somewhat famous little parable.

Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV) – This is the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He says:

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But

everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Jesus describes a typical storm in a hot, dry climate of Near Eastern lands. Blasting winds were accompanied by torrential rains. These produced flash foods. The water swept down often overwhelming villages. Houses built on sandbeds would be swept away. But those built on rocks could survive. Lives build on the Rock of Jesus and His words survive. Others are swept away. Our lives might be sunny right now. But that doesn't mean we can wander far from the rock. You never know when a storm might come. So we too must build our lives on Jesus by taking in His teaching and then acting on it. We need to ask the Holy Spirit for His help and power to obey Jesus' teaching even when we don't feel like it. Then when storms come, we still may feel some terror and discomfort. But we can know the security that comes with a life built on the Rock of our God.

What might it look like to live this out? I came across a blog post entitled "Where does your security lie?" on "totally new moms blogspot." Here's someone living out dependence on God our Rock.

Where does your security lie?

This has been a tough week for me and I cannot avoid that as I write. I wanted so badly to come up with something cute or happy or anything fun. But my heart is heavy and I can't fake it.

My precious Aunt Carolyn died on Sunday. I could write about her for hours. She was much more than an aunt to me, she was like my mother. She was my biggest cheerleader and encourager. No one on this planet has ever showed me love and acceptance as she did. The world without her in it makes no sense to me whatsoever. I loved her husband (my Uncle Yank) and her mother (Gram) like crazy, too. They are all gone now. The three of them made such a great security blanket of comfort, encouragement, and love for me. Now with Carolyn gone I don't know which end is up. I feel sick and sad and downright horrible.

Now don't get me wrong. Please don't send me Scriptures explaining who God is to us in times of trouble. I get all that.

Believe me, God's been hearing from me. I know who he is and who I am because of him. But let me tell you, there are people in this world that really matter. They have an impact on who you truly

are. They are so much a part of me that I feel like part of me is gone. And that pain is real. No, God doesn't change. He is our rock and comforter. He is our strong tower, our help in time of need. But that doesn't mean we don't cry our eyes out. It just means we have someone who will listen! He never disappoints. He is an ever-present shoulder to cry on.

Here's the good part. Even with these wonderful people gone I still feel love and security. Where does that come from? Jesus of course. I'm in excruciating pain but Jesus is still there. Even when the world seems chaotic and your life seems upside down, Jesus doesn't go anywhere. Are you teaching your kids that? It's easy to read them Bible stories and have devotions, etc. It's fun to teach kids about Jesus. But when life is hard kids see what it is that we turn to. Do we turn to people? Do we turn to ourselves? Do we crawl in our beds? Do your kids see you turn to Jesus? Do they see you turn to chocolate or soap operas or any escape possible? I'm asking this because I'm right in the middle of it, reflecting as I go.

I pray as life's hard parts come that God is who you turn to. You and your children will reap eternal benefits and much peace as a

result. I do know that God is the great I Am. That's what I'm holding onto this day. Be lifted- Sue - Proverbs 14:26

He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

<http://totallynewmoms.blogspot.com/2008/07/where-does-your-security-lie.html>

Perhaps something you built your life upon has fallen apart. Maybe something you thought was rock like turned into sand. You may have little strength. But we have a rock to turn to that is infinitely secure and absolutely trustworthy. Will you bring to Him whatever threatens your security now as we pray?