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Psalms 1:1–3, ESV

*1 Blessed is the one
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

We Are All Ants: *Carrying Holy Crumbs.*

When I was a boy, I remember being told stories of the early Christians, the people in the Bible who helped found the church, who planted the seeds of our faith, who led others from the corrupt ways of this world to the ways of God's world - and those are the ways of forgiveness, generosity, and grace. There was Peter, the rock upon which Jesus built his church. There was Paul, the man who wandered his entire known world, walking thousands of miles, founding churches, and writing letters that ended up forming much of the core of the New Testament. There was Luke, who as a young man, accompanied Paul on his travels and wrote two books of the New Testament. Then there were lesser-

known people, like Barnabas, another companion of Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, early teachers and evangelists, Martha and Mary, who brought Jesus into their home, and Phoebe, who was trusted with the long, hazardous journey to bring Paul's most influential letter to the believers in Rome, thus preserving perhaps the most important book of the New Testament, outside of the Gospels. There were also countless early believers who lived in the few centuries after the life of Christ, people who wrote highly influential documents and who helped grow the church. We've looked at some of them in passing. In some ways, as a boy, I envied these people, born at just the right time, in just the right place, and who rose above the corruption of the world around them to serve God, and to serve all those created by God.

But first, let's step aside and consider ants, those tiny creatures who you would do anything to keep out of your kitchen. Have you ever seen a line of ants, walking along the ground, carrying crumbs of food on their backs? To us, that food consists of tiny bits of somebody's garbage or some little piece of a plant, but to those ants, those bits of unidentifiable organic material are massive and life-preserving. We imagine them carrying them back to the anthill so that all the ants can eat, so that the baby ants don't go hungry. Ants struggle amazingly, each one seemingly defying the laws of physics to bring back enormous finds from their

hunting and gathering expeditions. We could anthropomorphize the ants and further imagine that the ants who bring back particularly large crumbs are received by their fellows back at the hill as the bravest, hardiest, and most successful members of their complex society. Perhaps one of the ants, someone who in the past was largely ignored as an individual and lived an anonymous life, managed to come back with not only a huge crumb, but one made of pure dark chocolate. A human had been walking by eating a candy bar and had, unnoticed, allowed a precious piece to drop to the ground. The ant, we'll call him Tony, who managed to stumble upon that chocolate and then heave it onto his back and struggle all the way back to the hill with it, will be remembered as a true hero and the name of Tony will be passed down for generations.

Hebrews is an unusual New Testament book. Its Greek is complex and eloquent, and it has a sophisticated vocabulary. It offers both stern warnings to those who would abandon God and the most compelling encouragements for those who are among the Christian faithful. We do not know who wrote it. But it is ancient, it is a true New Testament era document, certainly written during the first century A.D. – because it was already being quoted in the year 90. We call it a letter, but it is not structured as an ancient Greek letter, there is no greeting, no address, and no stated authorship. It reads more like a circular letter written by a

highly regarded Church leader to those who need guidance. Chapter 11 of Hebrews talks about faith. It tells us where a life of faith can lead us. The author inspires us with stories of faith. Here is how the chapter begins:

***11** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

This is simply meant to tell us that the universe was created by the word of God and nothing else. It is a basic tenant of our faith – that no matter what the creations process, God directed every bit of it. What I love about this quote is how it ends: *“so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”* This feels like a very modern statement, that the world that we can see in truth consists of things that for the most part we absolutely cannot see.

In truth, our perspective of the universe is only a bit broader than that of an ant. We know that the cosmos is so vastly larger than our earth, than our solar system, our galaxy. But we can’t even comprehend the ultimate size of physical reality. It goes on seemingly forever, always expanding, and we somehow exist in the middle of a universe-wide explosion. There are also many more dimensions than we can detect with our senses and our minds, some scientists say 10 or 11, other says 26 dimensions. Quantum physics tells us that over ninety-five percent

of reality goes undetected by us. We don't know what surrounds us: the world is filled with unknown particles. We apparently don't move linearly through time. They say that the universe is parallel and combinatorial in nature, and with each event, there are multiple possibilities causing the universe to break into multiple realities. Perhaps when Harry Potter tries to step through the brick wall at the train station to get on the train to his school of magic, countless copies of Harry all make the attempt at the same time, with many billions of copies of him not succeeding, but one of those copies of Harry actually moving the atoms that make up his body through the atoms that make up the wall. So, in some version of reality, Harry does indeed walk through the brick wall. Our lifespans cover only the tiniest of instants of time, but with the cosmos having existed for an amount of time we cannot wrap our minds around. It might be that time will finally come to an end when the universe reaches maximum randomness or entropy, and perhaps at that point, time will cease to exist. So, in sum, we think that we are very smart, that we are magnificent inventors and developers, that we have conquered the world in which we live. But, in truth, we are very much like those ants, extraordinarily small creatures, with infinitesimal lifespans, and with very little understanding of the nature of the universe. We are no more powerful within the universe than those ants who are wandering around their anthill.

In fact, God wants us to be humble and to see ourselves from the perspective of ants who work hard and serve each other, and who do not see themselves as special. Here is a Proverb from Chapter 6:

⁶Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways and be wise.

But let's get back to successful people, folks who have made a huge impact on the world. To the vast majority of people in this nation, folks who have had a huge impact on the Christian faith are not the real heroes. Our society worships celebrities, actors, athletes, corporate entrepreneurs - those are the people who are to be envied. They accomplish incredible things. But we know the truth. Most of us ants only find unidentifiable, modest sized crumbs of organic material and bring them back to the hill. These famous envied people, well, they're the ones who manage to bring back a piece of pure dark chocolate to the anthill. We will not be remembered in the hill. They will be remembered for generations in the hill. But what do we really want to accomplish in life?

What matters is what we build up in the Kingdom of God. A very modest contribution in that world is infinitely more important than a huge contribution in the Kingdom of People, the anthill. Let's look at the beginning of the first Psalm.

*1 Blessed is the one
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
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2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
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3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

This is perhaps the most important lesson we can gather from the words of the ancient Israelite sages. We must do blessed things with our lives. We must live the way Christ taught us to live. Most importantly, the scale of our lives, in years lived, in money we have made, in possessions we have collected, in the honors that society has heaped upon us, on the envy with which others hold us - none of that matters. We simply need to find the path to God, that is the way to prosper. We need to bring something back to the anthill, but to do it within the Kingdom of God. Whatever we can bring in the name of God, it is not only enough, it is magnificent. We need to ignore a society that sees most of us as radically insignificant and remember that God sees each of us as incredibly important. We are like a tree planted by streams of water. We will yield fruit, we will prosper – in the eyes of God, in the eyes of the only entity that truly matters.

Here is the Gospel of Matthew 16:26–27, from the ESV:

²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

This passage is very famous. These words are spoken by Jesus just after he fends off the corrupt religious leaders of his day, who have challenged his authority. After this, Peter, the great Apostle, accepts Jesus as his savior and Jesus tells Peter that upon the rock of Peter, Jesus will build his church. His church isn't a building. It is a people of faith who would one day spread around the globe, into a faraway side of the world that people of that time and place didn't even know existed. Next, Jesus predicts his own murder and subsequent resurrection. Finally, preaching to his followers, Jesus declares that if you are the most successful and envied person on this planet, but you have wandered from the path that weaves through the Kingdom of God, then you have gained nothing permanent in life.

Now, consider Deuteronomy 8:18–19, again from the ESV:

¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. ¹⁹ And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Jewish Torah, the Christian Pentateuch, and in it, Moses – who himself will not live to enter the Promised

Land – is preparing his people to enter the land that God has given them. This quote is one of the key teachings of Deuteronomy. Moses tells the people whose heritage we have inherited that they must have God foremost in their minds. We must remember that it is God who gives us the wealth that is truly valuable. If we find ourselves serving the gods of the human world, we are horrifically lost.

Those are the three big lessons that have to do with living on the anthill that is our universe. First, we must be deeply rooted in our faith and do what our faith tells us that we must do. Second, we must not fall to the temptation to listen to society, to our corrupt world, and waste our lives chasing down the things of this world. And third, we must stay connected to God in our daily lives. We must remember that God is the source of all truly eternal gifts. The things that we bring home on our backs, no matter how important they are in the Kingdom of People, only last for the briefest instant and exist in the tiniest of spaces. What matters is what is the depth of our faith, what lives in our hearts, our minds, and our souls. If we follow these three principles, if we are committed in our faith, if we put the things of God's world above the things of this world, and if we keep God in our lives every moment, we will indeed be serving God and God's people. This constitutes true success in the universe. By walking in the Kingdom of God, we can exist in the true world, the one that our senses cannot

detect. We can also walk into and through eternity. Yes, all we must do is live in the Kingdom of God, and not the Kingdom of People, and we will be doing far more than if we were the most successful, powerful, worshipped person on this planet. The crumb we carry to humanity on our backs will be so huge that it is immeasurable if that crumb is found in the Kingdom of God.

There is nothing inherently wrong with being successful and powerful in this world – although I don't think it's good to be worshipped. In fact, we can enhance our work in the Kingdom of God if we use our earthly position to improve the lives of others or to bring them to God. But we must resist the powerful temptation to live only for the things of this world. As our society becomes more secular, more post-Christian, that pressure will only increase. It is becoming very hard to live in this world and walk in the Kingdom of God.

The real shame is that it's a lot easier to please God than to please people. That's the ironic part, if you are tempted by the things of this world, if this life seems so much easier to make our own than that mysterious world of faith. In truth, it is much easier to live the way God wants us to, and what we do in God's world is eternal. There are two ways that we can live like Tony the ant. We can live for the accolades of the other ants in the hill. Or we can serve the other ants in the anthill in the name of God by serving in practical ways, by being forgiving,

by passing on the grace that God gives us. When we do that second thing, when we walk with God – we can only succeed. God shows us a piece of the universe that is infinite in size and infinite in its lifespan, and it is so easy to step into that kingdom, carry crumbs that are truly holy, bring them back to an anthill that is in desperate need - and live in the Kingdom of God – forever.