



May 22, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:10

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altabap@aol.com

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altabapprayer@aol.com

Connie Larson DeV Vaughn, pastor

George Van Alstine, associate pastor

ALTADENA BAPTIST CHURCH
791 E. Calaveras Street
Altadena, CA 91001-2447
(626) 797-8970

“Wait For It!”

A good comedian has to develop a precise sense of timing. He'll probably tell a story as a “set-up”; then at just the right moment, he'll deliver the “punch line.” If the timing isn't perfect, the punch line will lose its punch. I've heard a comedian remind his audience that the punch line is about to be delivered by ending his set-up with the words “**Wait for it!**” --(pause) -- then delivering his punch line.

There's a literary device used by Agur, the author of Proverbs 30, that is missed by many modern readers of the Bible. I call it the “three-thing-no-four-thing” technique. Agur's set-up is expressed in three observations about life that have something in common. Then he makes a fourth observation that is his main point. It feels as if, after the third point, he's saying “**Wait for it!**” Then he gives us the zinger.

Here are some of his wise sayings:¹

Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:

(1) the way of an eagle in the sky,

(2) the way of a snake on a rock,

(3) the way of a ship on the high seas and

[Wait for it!] (4) the way of a man with a woman.

(verses 18-19)

Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up:

(1) a slave when he becomes king

and (2) a fool when gluttoned with food,

(3) a contemptible woman when she gets a husband and

[Wait for it!] (4) a maid when she supplants her mistress. (verses 21-23)

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Then the author puts this wise saying out as his three-thing-no-four-thing climax:

*Three things are stately in their stride;
four are stately in their gait:*

*(1) the lion, which is mightiest among
wild animals and does not turn back
before any;*

*(2) the strutting rooster, (3) the he-goat,
and*

*[Wait for it!] (4) a king against whom
none can stand. (verses 29-31)*

This seems to be a clever way for Agur to speak out against an unpopular king's arbitrary expression of authority: A male lion roars that he is king of the animals, a rooster shows the same testosterone-pride by "strutting" around, a male goat butts potential rivals to prove his masculine prowess. And **[Wait for it!]** an insecure king will constantly display his authority to reassure himself.

At the end of his discourse, Agur abruptly changes to second person pronouns, as if he's pointing at the reader:

*If **you** have been foolish, exalting
yourself,
or if **you** have been devising evil,
put **your** hand on **your** mouth. (verse
32)*

This is a warning that any one of us who has a little power may be tempted to act like the Strutting Rooster King. The final verse adds the warning that the misuse of force always has serious consequences:

*For as pressing milk produces curds
and pressing the nose produces blood,
so pressing anger produces strife.
(verse 33)²*

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ Other instances of this pattern can be seen in verses 11 – 14, verses 15 – 16, verses 24 – 28.

² The King James Version obscures the parallelism by using three different English words to translate the same Hebrew word, translated here by *pressing*.