

The Power of Heavenly Wisdom
Ecclesiastes 9:13-18; 2 Corinthians 8:9
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Very often we judge whether people have something of significance to offer us by their outward gifts and accomplishments: whether by their knowledge or the degrees behind their name, whether by their ability to communicate well in public or their ease at striking up a conversation in private, whether by the size of their home or the car that they drive, whether by the position they have at work or the size of their income, whether by their musical, athletic, or artistic abilities, or whether by their outward beauty or physical strength. You will recall that the prophet Samuel likewise looked to the outward appearance when he was commanded by God to anoint the next king from among the sons of Jesse. Samuel looked at the fine specimen of a man that stood before him in the person of the eldest son of Jesse and said to himself, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him" (1 Samuel 16:6). However, the Lord rebuked and corrected this faulty thinking of Samuel with these words in 1 Samuel 16:7: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." Remember also the words of the Lord Jesus which were addressed against the Pharisees who prided themselves in their mere outward show of piety, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Of course, this is not to say that those who use their gifts diligently and honorably to glorify the Lord ought to be disregarded in the words that they speak to us. In fact, those who have faithfully used their gifts and abilities to serve God and others would likely have much heavenly wisdom to impart to us. The point that we should not miss is that mere outward ability and accomplishment do not necessarily guarantee that one is filled with heavenly wisdom. For heavenly wisdom is a grace freely imparted to those alone who turn from their sin (which deserves eternal condemnation), and rather turn in faith to Christ alone as their only righteousness. Dear ones, even those who are of a very humble status with little or no outward showy gifts and abilities may be greatly endowed with heavenly wisdom, because they are not forgetful hearers of God's Word, but rather effectual doers. Their knowledge of Christ is not theoretical, but is practical. True and faithful doctrine is not merely professed—it is also lived in both the public and private realm. That is an evidence of one who knows Christ and possesses heavenly wisdom.

From our text this Lord's Day (in Ecclesiastes 9:13-18), Solomon encourages us (whether we find ourselves in humble or lofty circumstances) that he who is filled with heavenly wisdom is not necessarily one who is great in the eyes of the world by way of his pomp and circumstances, but is one who is great in the eyes of God by way of his humble obedience and submission to God's commandments. The main points from our text today are the following: (1) A Great Example of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:13-15); and (2) The Advantages of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:16-18).

I. A Great Example of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:13-15).

A. In the previous sermon (taken from Ecclesiastes 9:11-12), you will recall that Solomon warned not to put your confidence in man or in the resources of man as guaranteeing success. Even though God ordinarily works by appointed means to bring to pass the goals you have set, you cannot adopt the view that if you work hard or if you are obedient to God's commandments that you are automatically assured of reaching all your goals in this life. For Solomon says that the race is not to the swift nor is the battle to the strong. Sometimes those who prepare most for the race or for the battle find that they are not able (due to God's

most wise and most holy providence) to finish the race or to win the battle. And if their hope is so dependent upon the arm of flesh to get them to the finish line, sooner or later the weakness of the arm of flesh will be revealed, and their joy (which was in the arm of flesh) will quickly vanish. Dear ones, you must not place your faith and hope in your own mere resources, believing you are automatically guaranteed success in what you endeavor. Your faith must be in the Lord, who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). This is the only way to enjoy the blessings of God in this life, regardless of whether you reach the goals in life that you have set for yourself or not.

B. Solomon now brings before your attention (in Ecclesiastes 9:13-15) an illustration as to how heavenly wisdom is of far surpassing value to that of the arm of flesh (or mere human ability). If you are going to spend your time developing and growing that which will help you face the twists and turns of God's amazing providence in your life and yet find the joy of the Lord in whatever God brings into your life, then spend time praying for heavenly wisdom, so that you know how to apply the truth of God's Word to every area and circumstance of your life; and spend time hungering and thirsting for heavenly wisdom, studying and applying heavenly wisdom in your life. Merely developing your skills and abilities in order to reach the goals you have set for your life will not help you when those human resources fail or are taken from you. What does the athlete (who has spent his entire life preparing to go to the Olympics but has spent no time hungering and thirsting for heavenly wisdom) do when a car accident brings to an end his goal? Or what does a parent (who has spent so much time training his/her child to serve the Lord but has spent little time developing the grace of heavenly wisdom) do when the child walks away from the faith? Or what does a spouse (who has given his/her life to the marriage but has not grown in heavenly wisdom) do when one's spouse proves to be unfaithful? Or what does one (who has pursued every pleasure on earth but has not pursued heavenly wisdom) do when he/she faces death? Dear ones, mere human resources reach an end and can only go so far. Then what? Listen to the Psalmist in Psalm 127:1-2. Dear ones, heavenly wisdom takes you all the way home. Heavenly wisdom prepares you for God's twists and turns in His providence. Heavenly wisdom teaches you how to respond in every unforeseen circumstance of life. Heavenly wisdom shows you how to enjoy the Lord and every blessing in this life, even when adversity turns all your plans upside down and inside out. Dear ones, heavenly wisdom ought to be at the very top of your list of graces for which you hunger and thirst and pray (Proverbs 3:13-15).

1. Solomon illustrates the far surpassing greatness of heavenly wisdom by means of a story. Now we do not know whether this story is founded upon some historical event, or whether it is simply a parable. If it does refer to some historical event, we do not know the specific event to which it refers. Whether this story actually happened, or whether it is a parable, the truth presented is not altered in the least. Let us summarize that which is significant from Solomon's story, so that we do not miss the point. Solomon's story contains an account of a small city that has very few men within it to defend it from a mighty king who has many men and who lays siege all around the small city. This mighty king erects his bulwarks or high towers outside the walls of the city, in order to shoot arrows or to cast stones or to hurl hot oil over the walls and into the city. Here it appears the only thing for the small city to do is to surrender to the mighty king or to valiantly fight a losing battle to death. Either of these two options would likely bring upon the small city torture, rape, captivity, and death. There is none so powerful or so strong that he can deliver the small city from the mighty king. But there is found within the small city a poor man who is filled with heavenly wisdom. He has neither riches nor social status. He has neither power nor weapons. But by the use of heavenly wisdom, he rescues the small city from impending destruction. Exactly how he delivered the city we are not told. That is not the important point to Solomon. What is important is that it was not by the ordinary means of power, strength, riches, or weapons that the poor wise man saved his city. There are some examples from Scripture that do detail amazing deliverances from impending doom and destruction.

a. Elisha, the prophet, was within the small city of Dothan when the host of the

Syrian army surrounded it and might have destroyed the city in order to capture Elisha. Not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of God, Elisha was used to bring deliverance to the city as he prayed that the eyes of the Syrians might be blinded (as we see in 2 Kings 6).

b. On another occasion the Syrian armies besieged the capital city of Israel, Samaria (in 2 Kings 7). Famine was within the city as there was no food. Mothers were even wickedly doing the unthinkable: eating their own children. Yet the prophet Elisha prophesied to the king of Israel that tomorrow at noon there would be deliverance. During the night God caused the Syrians to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a mighty army which threw the Syrians into a panic in the dead of night—thus, fleeing in fear.

c. On another occasion a wise woman saved a city from the destruction of Joab (captain of David's hosts) when she threw the head of the enemy whom Joab pursued over the wall (in 2 Samuel 20).

d. You will recall how a frail and weak Abigail spared her husband and their whole house from David's anger by speaking wisely to David (in 1 Samuel 25).

e. So likewise, in Solomon's story the heavenly wisdom of this poor man far excelled the might and power of the king who besieged the small city. That is the inspired story Solomon tells, in order to illustrate to us the glories of heavenly wisdom over that of mere human resources and abilities. Solomon is not discouraging you from developing your gifts and abilities that God has given to you to use for God's glory. Solomon is simply stating that you cannot put your confidence in these mere human resources or abilities—you must look in faith to God and His wisdom to carry you through the adversities of life. There is no one strong enough to avoid the pains and heartaches of life in God's providence. There is no one smart enough to prepare oneself for the unforeseen storms of life in God's providence. There is no one rich enough to pay his way out of the afflictions of life in God's providence. There is no mere mortal godly enough to merit his way out of the trials and tribulations of life in God's providence. You must have more than mere human resources and gifts, if you would find the joy of the Lord in such uncertain circumstances. You must seek by faith alone the Lord Jesus Christ who is the wisdom of God. You must turn from your sin, your self-righteousness, and everything that you believe will earn favor with God. You must repent of your foolishness in trusting in yourself, in your baptism, in your obedience, in your church, or in anything you might offer to God as sufficient to deliver you from the miseries of this life and the pains of hell forever. You must cast yourself upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness alone. There is no other hope of deliverance from the besieging enemies of sin, the devil, and hell. Those enemies will certainly destroy you if you do not look to Christ (who became a poor wise man for you who trust in Christ), suffering the wrath of God for undeserving sinners, that you might be endowed with the riches of heaven through Him (2 Corinthians 8:9). Dear ones, the world believes that salvation by grace through faith alone in the crucified Christ is foolishness. But to you who believe and receive Christ, it is the power of God unto salvation—it is the wisdom of God manifested for all to see (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Come in faith to the poor wise man, Jesus Christ (He who became poor in order to make you rich), in order that you might be delivered now and for all eternity from those enemies that would destroy you.

II. The Advantages of Heavenly Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:16-18).

A. Solomon now turns our attention to the advantages of this heavenly wisdom in comparison to the resources of this world. The world will tell you that strength, power, weapons, education, riches, beauty, gifts, and abilities will bring joy in this life. However, Solomon, the wisest mere mortal that ever lived, disagrees, as does God who inspired Solomon to write these words. Who are you going to believe—God or man? Dear ones, to disbelieve the Lord at this point is to invite the destruction that the small city would have received at the hands of the enemy had it not turned to the poor wise man. Let us then consider the advantages of heavenly wisdom over the resources of this world.

1. The first advantage that Solomon cites is found in Ecclesiastes 9:16: “Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength.”

a. Dear ones, heavenly wisdom is better than physical strength, better than mental strength, better than financial strength, better than familial strength, and better than musical, athletic, or artistic strength. All of those strengths just mentioned are blessings from God, but they cannot be relied upon to see you through the severe storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes of life. You are powerless before these circumstances. It is heavenly wisdom that will see you through. It is trusting in Christ, loving Christ, obeying Christ, and hoping in Christ that is your wisdom in this life. Heavenly wisdom is not only knowing that God is sovereign and works all things for your good (as His dear children), but applying it and practicing it in your life every day. Heavenly wisdom is not only knowing that husbands should love their wives and wives should submit to their husbands in the Lord; it is also practicing it. Heavenly wisdom is not only knowing that you are not to fear what your enemies may do to you; it also is turning by faith from what you can see with these eyes and rather seeing with the eye of faith the heavenly hosts that fill the mountains and completely surround your enemies. Heavenly wisdom is not only knowing that death is coming to you; it is also preparing for death by making the resurrected Christ your life right now, so that you lose nothing at death, but gain everything. Dear ones, wisdom is better than any worldly strength you might imagine.

b. But there is a caution to be given in regard to heavenly wisdom. Even though it is better than worldly strength, heavenly wisdom is not honored in this world as is worldly strength. For Solomon says, “nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard” (Ecclesiastes 9:16). You see, dear ones, everyone rallied around the poor wise man when the city had no one else to whom they could turn. The city leaders thrust him forward to deal with the seemingly impossible situation when there was no hope of deliverance by the ordinary means of strength and military might. But Solomon states that once the city was delivered from impending doom, no one remembered the poor wise man—no one rewarded or honored the poor wise man; for he was of poor rank and not of nobility (Ecclesiastes 9:15). Once the city was out of danger, they forgot the poor wise man and would not even listen to any of the wise words that their human deliverer spoke to them, but even despised him and his godly counsel to them (Ecclesiastes 9:16). Solomon warns us that the world does not honor those who have heavenly wisdom. If you are pursuing heavenly wisdom in order to be honored by man, forget it—it will not usually happen. People will use those who have heavenly wisdom when they are in a very difficult situation, but so often will turn against them when they are out of the danger. It is like the scenario of a foxhole conversion. Promise the Lord anything and bargain with the Lord whatever it takes to get you out of the present danger, but once you are out, forget Him, forget the covenant and the promises you made to Him. The only problem, dear ones, is that the Lord doesn’t forget our covenant and promises made to Him.

2. The second advantage of heavenly wisdom given by Solomon is that it is a quiet grace that is heard (“The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools” Ecclesiastes 9:17). Heavenly wisdom is a quiet grace, in that it is not necessarily spoken with the greatest flashiness and flare, nor is it usually spoken with the loudest shout, nor is it necessarily spoken with the most eloquent oratorical skills. Heavenly wisdom is simple, faithful, loving, and true. Heavenly wisdom is speaking the truth of Christ in love. Heavenly wisdom is spoken not in order to please people (first and foremost), but in order to please God (first and foremost). It does not come with lightning, thundering, and fire, but usually comes with a still small quiet voice (1 Kings 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). God delights to give heavenly wisdom to all that diligently seek it, regardless of your abilities and calling. God delights to confound the wise of this world by the simple yet powerful preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Even a simple maid (who had heavenly wisdom) showed the Syrian captain Naaman (who had leprosy) the way to find healing and salvation (2 Kings 5). Even the prisoner, Joseph, who had heavenly wisdom, showed Pharaoh the way to preserve Egypt from destruction by famine (Genesis 41). Even simple Mary, the sister of Martha, manifested

heavenly wisdom by her earnest desire to sit at the feet of Christ in order to hear his words of wisdom, even if other duties were not immediately fulfilled (Luke 10:40-42).

3. Finally, Solomon says that heavenly wisdom is better than weapons of war in destroying your real enemies (“Wisdom is better than weapons of war” Ecclesiastes 9:18). Weapons of war may be the ordinary means of fighting a battle, but even they cannot be depended upon to secure victory. For as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:11: “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” It was by heavenly wisdom that the 300 men of Gideon defeated the Midianites who had over 125,000 soldiers in their ranks (Judges 7). It is by heavenly wisdom that you overcome your spiritual enemies (within and without) with whom is the real battle, rather than by weapons of war (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Heavenly wisdom is far more valuable than any worldly weapons. This is not to say that you cannot own weapons and use them if necessary to defend ourselves. It is simply to say that heavenly wisdom is of greater importance to defend yourself against all enemies. Just as a poor wise man may be used by the Lord to save a city, so likewise one sinner (who foolishly misleads others to follow him) will destroy a city, a family, a church, or a nation (a little leaven will leaven the whole lump). There is ever before us, dear ones, a practical choice to make. Will you supernaturally hunger and thirst to be wise, or will you fall by way of the natural pull downward to be foolish? Your decision not only affects yourself, but affects so many more than you could possibly imagine (for generations to come). Put your faith in the poor wise man, Jesus Christ, so that you may be delivered from sin, death, and hell now and for all eternity.

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