

“Wisdom and the Unexpected”  
Ecclesiastes 9:13-18  
(Preached at Trinity, December 3, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 9** Solomon has expressed the difficulty of comprehending God's actions upon the earth. There is both good and evil upon the earth. There are wicked and righteous men. They exist side by side. One would expect God's hand to be harsh upon the wicked but gentle upon the righteous. But upon observation, it would seem that the conditions are the same for both.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:2 NAU** - "It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean"  
**Ecclesiastes 9:3 NAU** - "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men."
2. God's Providence can be difficult to comprehend. It can be both unexpected and unpredictable.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:11 NAU** - "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all."  
The swift runner loses the race.  
The strongest warrior dies in battle.  
The wise and educated man ends up poor and hungry. Some living in homeless shelters are actually very intelligent. Knowledge does not equate to financial gain.  
Human ability is no guarantee of success.
3. The day of our death can also be unpredictable.  
A fish swimming freely is suddenly caught in a fisherman's net and killed.  
Likewise, a bird seeking food is suddenly ensnared to its death.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:12 NAU** - "Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them."
4. We don't always know what God is doing. Who can know what tomorrow will bring?  
As we move through this world it is important that we expect the unexpected.  
Solomon refers to the unexpected working of Divine Providence by the expression, "Time and chance" –  
**Ecclesiastes 9:11 NAU** - "for time and chance overtake them all."  
Solomon refers to bitter providence in **Verse 12** - he calls it an "evil time."  
**Ecclesiastes 9:12 NAU** - "men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them."

5. Of course, all of this is looking at God's Providence from our human perspective. God does not categorize His actions as hard versus easy. All of God's actions are good. Yet, all of us know the difference between well-being and calamity.

A. God is sovereign over it all.

B. God is in control and we are not. Live your life with contentment under God's hand of grace and give yourself to His service.

6. So how are we to live in this world that is so full of the unexpected?  
We need to spend our days wisely.

In **Verses 13-18** Solomon once again examines the virtues of wisdom as it applies to understanding God's work in the world and how we should respond.

He gives a brief example of one who gives himself in selfless service. Solomon was impressed by what he witnessed – **Verse 13** – “It impressed me. . .” The word in the Hebrew is נָדוּלָהּ which refers to something great or large.

- I. Solomon tells of a city delivered by wisdom

A. It was a small insignificant city that came under attack by a powerful king.

1. The city was surrounded by a great and powerful king and a siege wall was erected around it.
2. The city had few men and no army and there was little hope for survival.
3. Within the city there was a lone wise man. He was poor and of little importance. He spoke words of wisdom, words that would deliver the city.
4. We aren't told how he did it. Only that it was by the words of his wisdom that the city was saved.
5. The blessedness of wisdom. It reminds us of Abigail by whose wisdom many were saved from the wrath of David.

**1 Samuel 25:32-34 NAU** - "Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, <sup>33</sup> and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. <sup>34</sup> "Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light *as much as one male*."

6. How blessed the people were to have even a single wise person in their midst. Or a nation or a family or a church.

B. Once again, we find that few treasure the voice of wisdom.

1. What was the outcome of the wise counsel of the poor man.
2. One way we can read it is the wise man's words were not heeded and the city was destroyed.

**Ecclesiastes 9:16 NAU** - "But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded."

3. Or it could be that by the wise man's wisdom the city was saved but he was soon forgotten.

**Ecclesiastes 9:15 NAU** - "Yet no one remembered that poor man."

4. We can think of Joseph.
  - a. By his words the butler was saved but Joseph was forgotten and left to languish in prison.
  - b. Later by Joseph's wisdom the entire nation of Egypt was delivered along with his own people but his wisdom would eventually be forgotten.  
**Exodus. 1:6-8 NAU** - "Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. <sup>7</sup> But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them. <sup>8</sup> Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."
5. By either interpretation, we can see how little value is placed upon wisdom. Most don't understand it, nor desire it.

## II. How does this help us to understand the workings of Divine Providence?

- A. God often works through the wisdom of men.
  1. In our fallen condition, no man possesses wisdom. In fact, all are fools.  
**Romans 1:21-22 NAU** - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools,"
  2. True wisdom is from the hand of God. He imparts it by His determinate counsel. He uses mere men for His own glory.
  3. The Providence of God is filled with the unexpected. God's ways are often mysterious and beyond our comprehension.
    - a. We place great value on might and power. We trust in our military.
    - b. Solomon's point in these verses was the battle was not given to the strong but to the wise.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:18 NAU** - "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good."  
**Psalms 20:7 NAU** - "Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God."
  4. It takes wisdom to listen to the wise.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:17 NAU** - "The words of the wise heard in quietness are *better* than the shouting of a ruler among fools."
- B. While God is working His righteous purpose upon the earth, it is in the context of fallen men.
  1. God displays His grace through the faithfulness of men. A single faithful man or woman can save a nation.
  2. Wickedness is still present. One wicked man can do much harm.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:18-10:1 NAU** - "one sinner destroys much good." But God's redemptive purpose will not be thwarted.

3. We will always face the unexpected. This is how God works. Uncertainty is the rule of life.  
The wise man patiently waits upon God in all humility, submitting to the sovereign pleasure of God.  
**Ecclesiastes 7:14 NAU** - "In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything *that will be* after him."

#### Conclusion:

1. How do we live in a world of the unexpected, a world where adversity can happen at any moment? Our first priority is to trust our life to Jesus Christ. He alone is able to satisfy Divine justice. He alone is able to provide forgiveness for our sin. He alone makes the difference between the wicked and the righteous. He alone makes the difference between the wise and the foolish.
2. Second of all, we must live wisely. We must live trusting that God always does that which is good and right. We must continue to speak the truth of God's Word. This is our wisdom.
  - a. Solomon is telling us it isn't by our might or power that we prevail in this world. It is our confidence in God's Word.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:17 NAU** - "The words of the wise heard in quietness are *better* than the shouting of a ruler among fools."  
**Ecclesiastes 9:16 NAU** - "Wisdom is better than strength."  
**Ecclesiastes 9:18 NAU** - "Wisdom is better than weapons of war"
  - b. Solomon isn't denying that there are times when force is necessary. He says in **Chapter 3**  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1 NAU** - "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven--"  
**Ecclesiastes 3:8 NAU** - "A time for war and a time for peace."
  - c. But our hope and confidence is not upon earthly power.
3. We must embrace the Christian graces as we face the unexpected—when gloom descends upon our life.
  - a. We must strive to be faithful. We don't know what tomorrow will bring but we can be faithful in it. We may have to deal with endless mundane tasks, but we can do them all with patience and faithfulness, seeking to honor God in them. We may face trying times full of adversity, but we can trust God through it all. This takes much grace.  
**Ecclesiastes 9:10 NAU** - "Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with *all* your might"
  - b. We must receive all things with thanksgiving remembering that God is working for our good.  
**1 Thessalonians 5:18 NAU** - "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

- c. We must receive all things with contentment.  
**Philippians 4:11-13 NAU** - "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup> I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
- Hebrews 13:5-6 NAU** - "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," <sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"
- d. We must maintain a spirit of prayer. God has appointed the end of all things, but He is also sovereign over the means to the end. One of those means is prayer. We need to pray over every situation of life.  
**1 Thessalonians 5:17 NAU** - "pray without ceasing"
- e. We must set our hearts upon submission and humility embracing all that God does.  
**James 4:6-7 NAU** - "Therefore *it* says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."