

ECCLESIASTES 9

THE PARABLE OF THE LITTLE CITY

At the close of the preceding chapter, the royal Preacher recorded his conviction that it is impossible for the wisdom of man to fathom the ways of God. He himself had spent many sleepless hours trying to solve the riddle of the world; but he had found the mystery of Divine Providence too deep for him, and so he had given it up as unsolvable. Looking merely at the present life – at God’s dealings with men until the day of their death – he could discover no satisfactory reasons or fixed principles of the Divine working. Although we cannot doubt that all God’s dealings are in perfect consistency with His own righteousness, yet this righteousness is obscured – to our limited viewpoint – by the apparently random manner in which the same events often happen to both the righteous and the wicked. Human experience is often a mixture of joy and grief, health and sickness, and prosperity and adversity; and of this mingled experience, all people (generally speaking) are partakers. Solomon saw Divine Providence dealing with most men as if there were no difference in their characters – often until the very end of life. Then it subjected them all to the same doom of death. And the present condition of the dead was – to his mind – dark and cheerless. His words here are simply an echo of words which we find elsewhere in the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Psalms and the Book of Job. Heaven had not yet dawned before the eyes of men as “the Father’s house” of “many mansions.” Death had not yet been manifestly vanquished through the resurrection of the Prince of Life. Even now, there are many questions relating to the future state which baffle and perplex us. The fact of immortality has been brought to light clearly in the Gospel, but death is still surrounded by many mysteries. And even in spite of the “hope of glory” which we cherish through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are still prone – through that instinct in us which clings to the present life – to fall into some of the old-world ways of thinking and speaking about death.

But there was one thing of which Solomon seems to have felt quite sure; and this was that people ought not to allow the anomalies of Divine Providence, or the certainty of death and the grave, to rob them of that natural enjoyment of life which God intends them to have! Whatever elements of unsatisfactoriness may be in human life, however perplexing the riddle of Divine Providence may be, and however dark the mystery of death appears – we ought not to let these things plunge us into sullen gloom or despair which turns away from simple

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Solomon observes that outwardly, the good and evil fare alike – verses 1-3
- ❖ Death puts a final end to worldly duties and pleasures – verses 4-6
- ❖ We should enjoy life’s comforts and to do life’s duties while we can – verses 7-10
- ❖ God’s Providence determines the outcomes of people’s lives – verses 11-12
- ❖ Wisdom makes men useful, but not always well-respected – verses 13-18

pleasures and domestic joys. Life has its vanity, but life also has its solace; so let us not brood over the vanity so much as to rob ourselves of the solace.

The Preacher not only urges his readers to cheerfully enjoy the blessings of life while they last; but he also urges them, in the prospect of death, to earnestly do any work to which they may be called by the Lord. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." It is true that for a believer, life beyond the grave will be the greatest blessing he has ever experienced. But although life in heaven will be bliss untold, there is still work to be done in the present life, which can only be done *here and now*.

Now, beginning in verse 13, we are taught that nothing is to be judged by the estimation which people generally put upon it; for if we did so, the most valuable things would be considered trifles, and insignificant things would be deemed chief treasures. The political or military sagacity which saved a besieged city would be considered less important than the boasting, pompous words of a man who is able to make himself ruler over an ignorant, silly people. The simple lesson of the parable in verses 14 and 15 points to the folly and mistakes of people, in respect to the blessings which are placed within their reach. It illustrates the manner in which men often treat that wisdom which comes down from above. Notwithstanding the undeniable blessings which true religion confers on them, it is often overlooked and despised; for it does not come with pompous words and imposing display, nor does it condescend to employ the arts of deception and trickery.



The little city, with its few defenders, may represent the weakness of man in comparison with the number and power of his spiritual enemies. He needs a helper, and he will certainly be destroyed by the powerful king who has come up against him – unless some Deliverer appears. The "poor wise man" may personify that same Wisdom which is so beautifully described by Solomon, in the allegory contained in Proverbs 8, where we behold Wisdom as a picture of the Lord Jesus, Who gave Himself to save our perishing race! He was poor, despised, and rejected; and He did not present Himself as an ambitious and aspiring leader. Yet what great salvation He worked for His people!

The world's monuments have not always been dedicated to its greatest heroes, its truest benefactors, or its best teachers. Yet the seeds which these persons have dropped have brought forth rich fruit in future generations. Similarly, outward honors and material wealth are not the rewards of that heavenly yet practical Wisdom which consists in reverence, love, and obedience toward God! But when we get this Wisdom at the feet of our Savior, we may enjoy the one abiding certainty amidst all the uncertainties of life: the assurance of Jesus' wise and righteous love!

Lord Jesus, we ascribe everlasting praise, love, and thanksgiving to You – the "poor wise Man" who redeemed us from the certain destruction that awaited us! Amen.