

Yet No One Remembered that Poor Man

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to Ecclesiastes chapter 9, looking at the passage beginning at verse 13, the verses down from there to the end of the chapter. I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

As you are aware, these passages of the Old Testament, these books of the Old Testament, from the book of Job right through to the Song of Solomon, that chunk of the Old Testament are commonly referred to as the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Of course, that doesn't mean that there isn't wisdom or teaching on wisdom in other parts of the Old Testament, but these books by themselves are very much to do with the subject or the topic of wisdom in the different ways in which it is spoken about, the different ways in which it shows itself, the different ways in which it's commended to us by God.

When you come to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, wisdom is a very obvious topic in these books. It's right out there in the open. You can see that there are passages like this one that actually teach about wisdom.

And then when you go to the other books in this section of the Bible, wisdom is the underlying feature. It's not really there on the surface all that much, and yet the wisdom that is on the surface there in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and the definitions of it or the way in which it's handled, that same topic of wisdom underlies the other books, such as Job, where, for example, you find it brought into very close connection with deep suffering.

[1 : 49] And then you have love in the Song of Solomon and so on. You have it as an underlying feature, something that's there, and other things are built on top of it or more obvious.

What is this wisdom? Well, we've seen that many times, that wisdom in the biblical sense of it, in this particular sense in which it's dealt with in these books, this wisdom is really the ability to know and to discern and to act properly.

And that means the ability to know and to discern consistent with God's will and with God's revelation of himself and with God's requirement, with the mind of God as revealed to us in his word.

Wisdom takes in all of that in terms of how wisdom is seen in the lives of certain people, and especially the people of God. Because that's why you find often things like, or topics, important subjects like righteousness and justice and truth closely connected with wisdom and its outworking and our appreciation of what it is.

So that, of course, is a God-given ability. Wisdom does not come through natural ability. This wisdom, that is. Worldly wisdom does.

[3 : 13] Wisdom as defined outwith relationships with God. Yes, that is something that's very much dependent on human ability. But this wisdom is a wisdom that begins with God himself, who is wisdom and the fount of wisdom, which is why in the likes of Proverbs 9, verse 10 and similar verses, you'll find that wisdom is rooted in the fear of God.

It is actually, as far as we're concerned, and our practice of it is concerned, it actually grows from that relationship we have with God, where the fear of God, this respect we have for God, the respect and the desire to honor him and to live in awe of him in a way that pleases him and loves him for all that he is, for all that he's done, for all that he's spoken, for all that he will yet do.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It's the foundational element of wisdom, if you like. Wisdom is founded on that fear of God. It grows from that.

And in this particular passage in Ecclesiastes 9, we find that this wisdom is dealt with in telling us, first of all, about an incident.

And it looks as if it was an incident that really happened, we're not told anything about where it was or who the people were involved in it were. There are no names given either.

[4 : 41] But the incident is mentioned there in verses 13 to 15. And then from verse 16 to the end of the chapter, you have certain observations that the writer is drawing from that incident as he remembers it, as he puts it out before us.

There are three observations about wisdom that he then draws from what he says about the incident itself. And the incident is an interesting one.

And it's important that verse 13 there says, I have seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. It wasn't insignificant.

This is not just a nice story. It's not just something that has very interesting details about it, about an incident that's described there. It's something he said was particularly important to him.

It was great. It was something really substantial in his estimation. That's why he brings out these three observations from it in the final part of the passage. What is this incident?

[5 : 48] Well, first of all, there's a city in crisis. There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

That immediately conjures up in your mind a small town with few occupants, and not really many great resources. And along comes this great king with all of his resources, with all his military might, his great army, and just simply sets about besieging that city.

We're not told why. Maybe this city was of strategic importance where it was situated, and this king would know that if that were the case, then if he took this city, then he would have a great advantage in actually furthering his own interest in his kingdom.

We're not told. Maybe it was just a case of sheer greed. It's often the case, isn't it? Somebody that's really powerful and influential, and has access to all the most important worldly resources, sees, just like Ahab did with Naboth's vineyard, he sees something he doesn't really need it, but he's got to have it.

That's how greed works. It's not really necessity. It's just simply that the mind of that sort of person just can't resist taking over somebody else's property or person, and they get a kick out of it, and it makes them feel more powerful.

[7 : 21] And that's repeated throughout many, many instances in human life, not just in kings or people in political power. It happens all the time. It still happens.

The little man is very often just kicked about and becomes the object of takeover and abuse from those that can do it in power.

Well, anyway, that's what it says. This little city with a few men in just a small town, you might say, and a great king came and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

And it seems almost just over, well, it is really over the top, isn't it? A small place like this, and yet he brought all of these massive siege works and the ramparts that he would have for making sure that he really just battered this city into submission.

And yet that's what happened. That's what was envisaged. You see, it's building up the picture for us.

- [8 : 33] And a lot of what you have in this passage delivers its message with a real punch by way of contrasts. The contrast between this little city and its few occupants and this great king with his might.

That's the first contrast. And then you find this contrast is when, in contrast with everybody else in the city, apparently there was this one poor wise man.

And he delivered the city by his wisdom. And again, we're not told how he did it. We're not told just how he went about securing the deliverance of the city from this besieging king and this army.

We're just told the fact of the matter. He did it. And the first thing you really notice from that is the combination of a poor man with wisdom. That's a contrast to the king that's outside, that thinks in the foolishness of his worldly thinking, because that's really what the passage surely intends we understand, that this man, because he was so powerful, and because he had such resources at his disposal, and because he had probably taken so many similar small towns or cities before, was absolutely sure that by that same power, he could actually bring this small city into submission all too quickly.

And yet, he more than meets as much, because a poor wise man manages to deliver the city. That's unexpected. It's not something that you would expect to read or to happen, but that's how it was.

- [10 : 14] Wisdom in the Bible is not very often coupled with great riches, or great worldly influence, or power of that kind, or with a celebrity cult, or something like that.

Wisdom is not united usually, though there are exceptions, with that sort of person, with that sort of movement. Here is wisdom found in a poor man.

A man who's insignificant to most people in that city, who's probably despised in many ways, in his poverty, and yet he becomes the saviour of the city.

And that is so much in line with the pattern that God brings to us in his word again, and again, and again, the pattern that what sinners disdain, what sinners look down on, what the worldly man dismisses, and actually hates, and positively cannot stand, God exalts.

God actually brings the very things that human beings, who seek to live without him, who despise him, and despise his laws, and yet the very things that people despise of that kind, are the very things, and the very qualities, and the very qualities, that God says, he delights in exalting, he delights in approving of, he delights in actually commending.

- [11 : 44] A poor man, but a wise man. And that's so much more, so much better than, and so much superior to, the king that's trying to take, this little city, by his own might.

And indeed, isn't that how it was, with the Lord himself. He didn't come into this world, as a splendid ruler, decked out in great majesty, and pomp, and ceremony.

He came into it, as a servant. He came into it, to minister, to serve. And you remember, what they said about him.

When they saw his miracles, they took note of them. When they heard his teaching, they took note of it. But so many people, that heard it, and saw the miracles, still despised him.

And you remember, in Mark's gospel, and it's also in Matthew's, Mark chapter 6, verse 3, this is what they said. Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and Joseph, whose sisters, and brothers, we know.

- [13 : 01] And then it says, and they were offended at him, or in him. They just found, fault with him, and they found, his whole emphasis, a scandal to them.

A poor, wise man, surrounded by, the wisdom of the world, is always going to be despised. Always going to be, look down on.

Always going to be regarded as, someone who really doesn't know, what wisdom is about. And yet this man here, by his wisdom, he delivered, the city.

Then you come to a, devastating statement. Yet, no one remembered, that poor man. Look at what he did.

Look at what's described there, against all the odds, you might say, we can use such language, against all the odds, this man, this poor man, by his wisdom, he actually delivered the city.

[14 : 05] He became the savior of the city. He was the person, who really led the city, to freedom, and caused, that it wasn't, overwhelmed, by this king, and his besieging army.

And yet, they forgot. He wasn't remembered. No one remembered, is what it says. No one remembered, that poor man.

I'm sure they were very glad, for the deliverance, when it happened. They'd have been, partying, and dancing, in the streets. They were so, glad, when this king, and his besieging army, disappeared, through the wisdom, of this poor man, whatever it was he did, it was hugely successful, and yet, so soon, no one remembered, this poor man, he went back to obscurity, and possibly even, to be disdained.

Isn't that like, human beings? Indeed, isn't it like, ourselves by nature? there's no evidence, of any honor, any praise, any thanks, given to this man.

Nobody even remembered, what he had done. He was all too soon, just, back in obscurity, as we said. Now, that of course, is repeated, time and again, in the history, of the world.

[15 : 38] And indeed, in the history, of the church, in the history, of nations, where God, has been seen at work, through certain people. You look at our own history, just to go not, no further than that itself, you could say, it's repeated, in many other nations, many other countries, many other instances.

Look at our own nation, look at the things, that we presently enjoy, as a people. The education system, for one thing, that we have. Where was it set up?

Who was responsible, in a large measure, for that? John Knox, and his reforming zeal, a school, in every parish, is what he set out, to achieve.

Where is he? In the thinking, of our people. Where is his like, in the mindset, of today's society, in Scotland.

We, as a people, have benefited, so much, from all of that, history, that God, has brought about, and fulfilled, in our history, as a people.

[16 : 56] And those, who are involved, are now, for many of our people. And it's not just, that they've, forgotten all about them, or didn't know, they exist. They're forgotten, in the sense, in which they, no longer matter.

They're no longer, significant. They're no longer, thought of as, worthy of being, remembered. Or their achievements, being marked. They're on the, scrap heap.

They're thrown aside. The great, deliverances, and the benefits, that came, from what they achieved, under God's grace, are no longer, thought, worthy, of being, thought about, or relevant, to our society, today.

And yes, if we're honest, as we must be, even we, ourselves, sometimes, fail to remember, what God, has done for us.

We mustn't, just leave it, outside of ourselves, and think, well, this is just, something you find, in society, in unbelieving society, in a society, that hates the gospel, by and large, this is something, that the Bible warns against, in terms of our own hearts, and our own minds, and our own sense, of what has been done, for us.

[18 : 16] Why is it, that the Bible, so often, uses the word, remember? Why did God, begin the fourth commandment, with the word, remember?

Well, it wasn't just, because, it had, the Lord's, the Sabbath day, had been rooted back, in creation, when God, had created, the whole universe, in the six days, and then, appointed this, day, as a day of rest, and marked it as such.

Yes, it brings that in, when you think, the word, remember, goes backwards, to the creation, but the word, remember, is also addressing, our propensity, to forget. And what God, is saying to us, don't you dare forget, what I've done for you.

Don't act as if, it wasn't significant. Oh, thou my soul, these words, that we've sung, a few minutes ago, thou my soul, bless God, the Lord, and not forgetful be, of all his gracious, benefits, he has bestowed, on thee.

Sometimes, talking to yourself, is not a sign, of foolishness. There's a man, talking to himself, in Psalm 103, speaking into his soul, speaking to himself, having a conversation, with his own mind.

[19 : 42] And that's what he's saying, don't you dare forget, my soul, what God has done, for you. And even such, a significant thing, as the death of Christ, it's put before us, in the way of a commandment, isn't it?

This do, in remembrance of me. As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you show forth, you remember the Lord's death, until he comes.

no one remembered, that poor man. And one of the great, one of the great motivations, that we have, for evangelism, for reaching out, with the gospel, is the fact that, so, so many people, out there, don't remember, what God has done, for them.

And don't remember, and don't appreciate, that every day, God is doing things, for them. And God is being, good to them. Yet nobody remembered, that poor man.

Whatever else, friends, be said of us, let it never be said, of us, that we fail, to remember, what has gone, towards our good, and our betterment, as a people, as a society.

[21 : 20] Whoever else forgets, let it not be me, and let it not be you. Because the wisdom, of God's word, is actually brought, before us, as something that includes, remembering, where our benefits, come from.

So that's the incident. And that was how it ended. As far as that poor man, was concerned. But then he comes, in verse 16, for the rest of the passage, to draw, certain observations, from that.

And he says there, but I say, see that tells you, he's reaching conclusions, or drawing observations, from, but I say, that wisdom, is better than might.

Though the poor man's, wisdom is despised, and his words, are not heard. Wisdom, is better than might. Now that doesn't just mean, physical strength.

You could actually, build into that, all kinds of things, such like, political strength. Or strength, in whatever way, you define it as, giving people, status, and influence, and levels of, importance, in human society.

[22 : 29] Wisdom, he says, is better, than strength. Because, what he's saying is that, even if the poor man's, wisdom is despised, and his words, are not heard.

Because, the poor man, you could, might say, represents really, those who are faithful to God, in these terms today. Who is the poor man today? It's the Christian, it's the person who stands, four square on the truth of God.

And who tries, to maintain, the integrity, of his witness, and her witness, against the assaults, of the rich, or of the powerful, of the influential, the mighty, you might say.

The ones who have all power, on their side, politically, or in terms of influence, or access to resources. But this is what it says. Remember, he says that, wisdom, is better, than might.

Wisdom, in a poor man, is much better, than the might, of this king, that besieged the city. And that's the lesson, he's drawing from it. Because, it's no gauge, to what's true, and what's wholesome, and what's beneficial, that most people rejected.

[23 : 42] That's no gauge, to whether it's the truth, or not. That's no gauge, as to what's reliable, and what's good, for human beings. You have to gauge it, by what is wisdom.

And how it fits in, with God's definition, of wisdom. And supposing, everybody in the land, or the most people, in the land, will actually elevate, and actually, want to commend, such things, as you can see, in our own society, are being commended.

Even, to the point, this week, where, permission was given, and I think, it's the first country, in the world, sadly, where such permission, has been given, to tamper, with human embryos, that are then, going to be destroyed.

Human life. How sad is that? How far, we have fallen. How far away, we are from wisdom, and from truth, and from the integrity, that God requires, of human beings.

That's what we've come to, and that's what you always, come to, when you reject God, when you reject, his wisdom, when you put, human wisdom, in the place of it.

[24 : 58] That's where you end up. Even human life, doesn't really, matter that much. Because, the arguments are, of course, it's such an early stage, of things, it's not really, a human life.

It's just, an embryo. Wisdom, is better than might. Even the might, of human opinion, or scientific opinion, you always, have to bring it back, to the wisdom, of the Bible.

The way things, God, have been defined, by God. And that's what, you measure it against. Secondly, quiet wisdom, outranks, foolish, loudness.

Difficult to get a, a kind of caption, for that. But, look what it says, in verse 17. The words of the wise, heard and quiet, are better than, the shouting, of a ruler, among fools.

A ruler, among fools, really means, effectively, the ruler, of fools. And it doesn't just mean, a ruler, who is wise, and he has many fools, under him.

[26 : 10] What this is saying is, this is the number one fool. The ruler, is the number one fool, and he has many fools, under his, his reign, or under his influence.

And what he's saying is, the shouting, of a ruler, among fools, has nothing like, as good, as the words, of the wise, heard and quiet. There's the contrast again.

Words of the wise, heard and quiet. And that really, brings to your mind, such things, as you often find, with the truth of God. It doesn't, set itself out, in any great show.

It doesn't really, act in a way, that's, full of clamor, and loudness, and that sort of, forcefulness. Even God, at times, when, in the likes of, Elijah, on Mount Horeb.

It wasn't the loudness, of the thunder, or the earthquake, or the fire, that brought out, his confession, of God being in that place, and he covered his face. It was a thin, silent, whisper.

[27 : 19] Thin, small voice. That's what truth is like. It's a thing of beauty. There's a gentleness, about it, in that sense.

Not that it's not, powerful, and potent, and destroys, human thinking, but, it doesn't do it, by bravado, it doesn't do it, by arrogance, it doesn't do it, by the shouting, of a ruler, over fools.

You've noticed, of course, how, untruth, and how, what opposes, the truth, very often, tries to just, ramrod its way, into influence, and to get, the majority, and to get itself, being enacted.

[28 : 49]

[34 : 13] Lord our God, and our Father in heaven, we thank you, for the promise, of your grace, to accompany, your people, at all times, to be at work, in them, and to be the one, who looks after them, and directs their lives, as only you can, we pray Lord, that you would make us wise, turn our hearts, to wisdom, each and every day, turn us away, from that, which is of ourselves, that which we might, think is, adequate for us, but it's really, just human wisdom, after all, make us wise, we pray, through your Holy Spirit, and help us, to relish your word, as that which forms, the basis for us, of our thoughts, and of our actions, as well, continue with us, now we pray, hear the prayers, of your people, here and elsewhere, for Jesus sake, Amen.