Ecclesiastes - Commentaries by T.W.P. Wolston, Editor

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“This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.”—ECCLES. 9:13-18.

IN this short story of the siege and deliverance of a city, does not the preacher preach to us today? Surely we may learn from it by analogy. Is it not a picture of many Gospel truths? Let us seek to gather a few practical points for the blessing of souls.

“There was a little city, and few men within it.” What is that but a picture of this world? From man’s point of view the world is great, and the race of man numerous; but from God’s point of view, it is but a little city indeed, and the fifteen hundred million or so inhabitants few indeed, when one thinks of Him, and compares them for a moment, for instance, with the innumerable company of angels who surround is throne. Before Him, “the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing.... All nations are before him as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity (Isa. 40:15-17).

“And there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. “In like manner a mighty foe has come with all his force against the city of this world. Satan has besieged it, and it is surrounded with the great bulwarks of sin. The enemy reigns on all hands, and misery reigns within. The whole human race is utterly powerless against him. If left to our own resources, so vast are his bulwarks that he has succeeded in building around us, his success must have been complete. Our condition is “without strength.” Poor, guilty, lost sinners, shut up under sin and Satan’s power, the only prospect before us is death, judgment, and the lake of fire. Such is the state of this little city, with every inhabitant in it.

“Now there was found in the city a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.” And so it came to pass in this poor world, when the siege had lasted four thousand years, a way of deliverance was opened. A poor wise man was found in the city; even Jesus, the Son of God. A poor and needy man (Psa. 109:16), in whom dwelt all the wisdom of God. And what all the efforts of the whole human race were utterly unavailing to accomplish, Jesus did. By His wisdom, He delivered the city. Not by His might, nor by His power; this He laid all aside. But crucified through weakness, He glorified God in death, and broke the whole power of the enemy! The cross is the true wisdom of God. There Jesus, the Lamb of God, died to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). That will be the glorious consummation at the end of time, the fruit of the travail of His soul, when the complete deliverance of heaven and earth from the whole of Satan’s power will be seen, and a new heaven and a new earth will shine forth, wherein righteousness shall dwell (2 Peter 3:13).

“Yet no man remembered that same poor man.” How forcibly this reminds us of the treatment that Jesus has received at the hands of a thankless world. He has wrought a mighty deliverance by His wisdom, whereby not only eternal results in the future are secured, but whereby any and every sinner in the little wicked city of this world can escape out of it now, break through the whole power of the enemy, and rejoice in the perfect liberty of God’s great salvation. But, alas, no one naturally remembers the Deliverer. We are so used to, and blinded as to, our true state, that we are utterly careless about it, and are content to remain in it. Many put on the garb of religious profession, but remain in their sin and misery, the victims of Satan’s awful power.

But, blessed be God, that same poor Man, Jesus, the Son of God, who lived in this little city, and died in grace for sin and sinners, lives again on high in the glory of God, a present Saviour for every one who believeth. But for grace, not one would remember Him. When He died, all forsook Him. But, His name be praised, grace works. Has it wrought in you? Have you discovered your utterly hopeless and lost condition, surrounded on all hands with the bulwarks of sin? If so, remember now that poor, wise Man, the triumphant Saviour in the glory of God. There is a present way of deliverance for you through His finished work—the wisdom of God. By faith in His name, you may know now that all your sins are forgiven (1 John 2:12), for a way is open through every bulwark right into the glory of God. You are in darkness here, and exposed to death and eternal woe; but believe on Him, Jesus, the Son of God, and you will come into His marvelous light, and have now eternal life. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47).

“Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless, the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.” Again, how true! “By strength shall no man prevail” (1 Sam. 2:9). We are “without strength” (Rom. 5:6). But when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6). Here is wisdom. Wisdom is better than strength. Your own strength, whatever form it may take, can only shut you out forever from God. Wisdom brings you to Him. Christ suffered for our sins, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). This is true for every believer. But, alas, the poor man’s wisdom is despised. Work, work, work, do, do, do, hope, hope, hope, are the words of the day, and thousands go on with them to the bitter end. But wisdom, a full salvation for all, without money and without price, through faith in Jesus’ blood, is despised on all hands. The words of man prevail, the doctrines of men are disseminated broadcast, and the mass accredit and devour them. God’s words, which endure forever, are not heard. Man is deaf to the voice of the Blessed Son of God. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

“The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.” God’s word is always true. The voice of the ruler among fools in the day of health, pleasure, and folly is heard often enough on all hands. But in quiet the scene is changed. When sickness comes, and the death-bed, and the sinner begins to realize that life is ebbing, death at the door, and eternity beyond, then it is that the words

of wise men are heard. At such moments the Lord’s servant oft finds his opportunity to tell out the precious words of Jesus in the ear of the poor perishing sinner. And then it is that the novel, is laid aside for the Bible, and the ear is opened to hear the blessed tale of God’s grace. Though, alas, such is the awful hardness of men’s hearts, that even then many are found who will be daring enough to push the truth from them, and to face death, God, and eternity without a Saviour.

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroyeth much good.” Yes, indeed, all the military power of the world, with all its boast and panoply and glory, could never deliver this poor benighted city, the world, from the awful power of Satan, its prince and god. Wisdom alone can do that. Or to apply it otherwise, all men’s weapons of war, when used, are for death. Life is turned into death thereby. Man in health and strength perishes before them, only too oft to enter eventually on eternal death, the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14, 15). But through wisdom we pass out of death into life, for the Lord is risen (John 5:24; Col. 3:3, 4).

And one sinner destroyeth much good. All the misery of this sin-stricken city came in by one man, Adam. He disobeyed God, and sinned. But the wisdom of the second Man, the last Adam, the dead and risen Christ, can meet our state and need. Sinner, how is it with you? Are you still part of this poor beleaguered world, or have you found wisdom’s way out of it? It must be one or the other. Christ is the wisdom of God for every one that believeth (1 Cor. 1:30). If you have learned the wisdom that is now found in Him above the sun, a blessing belongs to you which eclipses all beneath it. May you indeed be assured of this, for His blessed name’s sake, and henceforth follow His steps, till He come.

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