

CHAPTER 9

Solomon, in this chapter, for a further proof of the vanity of this world, gives us four observations which he had made upon a survey of the state of the children of men in it: —

I. He observed that commonly as to outward things, good and bad men fare much alike (v. 1-3).

II. That death puts a final period to all our employments and enjoyments in this world (v. 4-6), whence he infers that it is our wisdom to enjoy the comforts of life and mind the business of life, while it lasts (v. 7-10).

III. That God's providence often crosses the fairest and most hopeful probabilities of men's endeavour, and great calamities often surprise men ere they are aware (v. 11, 12).

IV. That wisdom often makes men very useful, and yet gains them little respect, for that persons of great merit are slighted (v. 13-18). And what is there then in this world that should make us fond of it?

❧ ECCLESIASTES 9:1-3

MYSTERIES IN PROVIDENCE

It has been observed concerning those who have pretended to search for the philosophers' stone that, though they could never find what they sought for, yet in the search they have hit upon many other useful discoveries and experiments. Thus Solomon, when, in the close of the foregoing chapter, he *applied his heart to know the work of God*, and took a great deal of pains to search into it, though he despaired of finding it out, yet he found out that which abundantly recompensed him for the search, and gave him some satisfaction, which he here gives us; *for* therefore *he considered all this in his heart*, and weighed it deliberately, that he might *declare* it for the good of others. Note, What we are *to declare* we should first *consider*; think twice before we speak once; and what we have *considered* we should then *declare*. *I believed, therefore have I spoken*.

The great difficulty which Solomon met with in studying the book of providence was the little difference that is made between good men and bad in the distribution of comforts and crosses, and the disposal of events. This has perplexed the minds of many wise and contemplative men. Solomon discourses of it in these verses, and, though he does not undertake to find out this *work of God*, yet he says that which may prevent its being a stumbling-block to us.

I. Before he describes the temptation in its strength he lays down a great and unquestionable truth, which he resolves to adhere to, and which, if firmly believed, will be sufficient to break the force of the temptation. This has been the way of God's people in grappling with this difficulty. Job, before he discourses of this matter, lays down the doctrine of God's omniscience (^{<B24>}Job 24:1), Jeremiah the doctrine of his righteousness (^{<A11>}Jeremiah 12:1), another prophet that of his holiness (^{<B13>}Habakkuk 1:13), the psalmist that of his goodness and peculiar favour to his own people (^{<B71>}Psalms 73:1), and that is it which Solomon here fastens upon and resolves to abide by, that, though good and evil seem to be dispensed promiscuously, yet God has a particular care of and concern for his own people: *The righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God*, under his special protection and guidance; all their affairs are managed by him for their good; all their wise and righteous actions *are in his hand*, to be recompensed in the other world, though not in this. They seem as if they were given up *into the hand of their enemies*, but it is not so. Men have *no power against them but what is given them from above*. The events that affect them do not come to pass by chance, but all according to the will and counsel of God, which will turn that to be for them which seemed to be most against them. Let this make us easy, whatever happens, that all God's saints are in his hand, (^{<B33>}Deuteronomy 33:3; ^{<B10>}John 10:29; ^{<B15>}Psalms 31:15).

II. He lays this down for a rule, that the love and hatred of God are not to be measured and judged of by men's outward condition. If prosperity were a certain sign of God's love, and affliction of his hatred, then it might justly be an offence to us to see the wicked and godly fare alike. But the matter is not so: *No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before him* in this world, by those things that are the objects of sense. These we may know by that which is within us; if we love God with all our heart, thereby we may know that he loves us, as we may know likewise that we are under his wrath if we be governed by that carnal mind which is enmity

to him. These will be known by that which shall be hereafter, by men's everlasting state; it is certain that men are happy or miserable according as they are under the love or hatred of God, but not according as they are under the smiles or frowns of the world; and therefore if God loves a righteous man (as certainly he does) he is happy, though the world frown upon him; and if he hates a wicked man (as certainly he does) he is miserable, though the world smile upon him. Then the offence of this promiscuous distribution of events has ceased.

III. Having laid down these principles, he acknowledges that *all things come alike to all*; so it has been formerly, and therefore we are not to think it strange if it be so now, if it be so with us and our families. Some make this, and all that follows to v. 13, to be the perverse reasoning of the atheists against the doctrine of God's providence; but I rather take it to be Solomon's concession, which he might the more freely make when he had fixed those truths which are sufficient to guard against any ill use that may be made of what he grants. Observe here (v. 2),

1. The great difference that there is between the characters of the righteous and the wicked, which, in several instances, are set the one over-against the other, to show that, though *all things come alike to all*, yet that does not in the least confound the eternal distinction between moral good and evil, but that remains immutable.

(1.) The righteous are *clean*, have *clean hands and pure hearts*; the wicked are *unclean*, under the dominion of unclean lusts, *pure perhaps in their own eyes*, but not *cleansed from their filthiness*, God will certainly put a difference *between the clean and the unclean, the precious and the vile*, in the other world, though he does not seem to do so in this.

(2.) The righteous *sacrifice*, that is, they make conscience of worshipping God according to his will, both with inward and outward worship; the wicked *sacrifice not*, that is, they live in the neglect of God's worship and grudge to part with any thing for his honour. *What is the Almighty, that they should serve him?*

(3.) The righteous are *good*, good in God's sight, they do good in the world; the wicked are *sinner*s, violating the laws of God and man, and provoking to both.

(4.) The wicked man *swears*, has no veneration for the name of God, but profanes it by swearing rashly and falsely; but the righteous man *fears an oath*, swears not, but is sworn, and then with great reverence; he fears to take an oath, because it is a solemn appeal to God as a witness and judge; he fears, when he has taken a oath, to break it, because God is righteous who takes vengeance.

2. The little difference there is between the conditions of the righteous and the wicked in this world: *There is one event to both*. Is David rich? So is Nabal. Is Joseph favoured by his prince? So is Haman. Is Ahab killed in a battle? So is Josiah. Are the bad figs carried to Babylon? So are the good, ^{<221>}Jeremiah 24:1. There is a vast difference between the original, the design, and the nature, of the same event to the one and to the other; the effects and issues of it are likewise vastly different; the same providence to the one is *a savour of life unto life*, to the other *of death unto death*, though, to outward appearance, it is the same.

IV. He owns this to be a very great grievance to those that are wise and good: "*This is an evil*, the greatest perplexity, *among all things that are done under the sun* (v. 3); nothing has given me more disturbance than this, *that there is one event unto all*." It hardens atheists, and strengthens the hands of evil-doers; for therefore it is that *the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and fully set in them to do evil*, ^{<211>}Ecclesiastes 8:11. When they see that *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked* they wickedly infer thence that it is all one to God whether they are righteous or wicked, and therefore they stick at nothing to gratify their lusts.

V. For the further clearing of this great difficulty, as he began this discourse with the doctrine of the happiness of the righteous (whatever they may suffer, they *and their works are in the hands of God*, and therefore in good hands, they could not be in better), so he concludes with the doctrine of the misery of the wicked; however they may prosper, *madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead*. Envy not the prosperity of evil-doers, for,

1. They are now madmen, and all the delights they seem to be blessed with are but like the pleasant dreams and fancies of a distracted man. They are *mad upon their idols* (^{<218>}Jeremiah 50:38), are mad against God's people, ^{<211>}Acts 26:11. When the prodigal repented, it is said, *He came to himself* (^{<257>}Luke 15:17), which intimates that he had been beside himself before.

2. They will shortly be dead men. They make a mighty noise and bustle *while they live*, but after awhile, *they go to the dead*, and there is an end of all their pomp and power; they will then be reckoned with for all their madness and outrage in sin. Though, on this side death, the righteous and the wicked seem alike, on the other side death there will be a vast difference between them.

~~2004~~ ECCLESIASTES 9:4-10

THE PROPER ENJOYMENT OF LIFE

Solomon, in a fret, had *praised the dead more than the living* (~~2002~~ Ecclesiastes 4:2); but here, considering the advantages of life to prepare for death and make sure the hope of a better life, he seems to be of another mind.

I. He shows the advantages which the living have above those that are dead, v. 4-6.

1. While there is life *there is hope*. *Dum spiro, spero* — *While I breathe, I hope*. It is the privilege of the living that they are *joined to the living*, in relation, commerce, and conversation, and, while they are so, *there is hope*. If a man's condition be, upon any account, bad, *there is hope* it will be amended. If *the heart be full of evil, and madness be in it*, yet while there is life *there is hope* that by the grace of God there may be a blessed change wrought; but after men *go to the dead* (v. 3) it is too late then; he that is then filthy will be filthy still, for ever filthy. If men be thrown aside as useless, yet, while they are *joined to the living*, *there is hope* that they may yet again take root and bear fruit; he that is alive is, or may be, good for something, but he that is dead, as to this world, is not capable of being any further serviceable. Therefore a *living dog is better than a dead lion*; the meanest beggar alive has that comfort of this world and does that service to it which the greatest prince, when he is dead, is utterly incapable of.

2. While there is life there is an opportunity of preparing for death: *The living know* that which the dead have no knowledge of, particularly they *know that they shall die*, and are, or may be, thereby influenced to prepare for that great change which will come certainly, and may come suddenly. Note, *The living cannot but know that they shall die*, that they must needs

die. They know they are under a sentence of death; they are already taken into custody by its messengers, and feel themselves declining. This is a needful useful knowledge; for what is our business, while we live, but to get ready to die: *The living know they shall die*; it is a thing yet to come, and therefore provision may be made for it. The dead know they are dead, and it is too late; they are on the other side the great gulf fixed.

3. When life is gone all this world is gone with it, as to us.

(1.) There is an end of all our acquaintance with this world and the things of it: *The dead know not any thing* of that which, while they lived, they were intimately conversant with. It does not appear that they know any thing of what is done by those they leave behind. Abraham is ignorant of us; they are removed *into darkness*, ~~412~~ Job 10:22.

(2.) There is an end of all our enjoyments in this world: *They have no more a reward* for their toils about the world, but all they got must be left to others; they have a reward for their holy actions, but not for their worldly ones. The meats and the belly will be destroyed together, ~~412~~ John 6:27; ~~413~~ 1 Corinthians 6:13. It is explained v. 6. *Neither have they any more a portion for ever*, none of that which they imagined would be a *portion for ever*, of that which *is done* and got *under the sun*. The things of this world will not be a portion for the soul because they will not be a portion for ever; those that choose them, and have them for *their good things*, have only a *portion in this life*, ~~4174~~ Psalm 17:14. The world can only be an annuity for life, not a *portion for ever*.

(3.) There is an end of their name. There are but few whose names survive them long; the grave is a land of forgetfulness, *for the memory of those* that are laid there *is soon forgotten*; their *place knows them no more*, nor the lands they called by their own names.

(4.) There is an end of their affections, their friendships and enmities: *Their love, and their hatred, and their envy have now perished*; the good things they loved, the evil things they hated, the prosperity of others, which they envied, are now all at an end with them. Death parts those that loved one another, and puts an end to their friendship, and those that hated one another too, and puts an end to their quarrels. *Actio moritur cum personf* — *The person and his actions die together*. There we shall be never the better for our friends (their love can do us no kindness), nor ever the worse for our enemies — their hatred and envy can do us no damage.

There the wicked cease from troubling. Those things which now so affect us and fill us, which we are so concerned about and so jealous of, will there be at an end.

II. Hence he infers that it is our wisdom to make the best use of life that we can while it does last, and manage wisely what remains of it.

1. Let us relish the comforts of life while we live, and cheerfully take our share of the enjoyments of it. Solomon, having been himself ensnared by the abuse of sensitive delights, warns others of the danger, not by a total prohibition of them, but by directing to the sober and moderate use of them; we may use the world, but must not abuse it, take what is to be had out of it, and expect no more. Here we have,

(1.) The particular instances of this cheerfulness prescribed: “Thou art drooping and melancholy, *go thy way*, like a fool as thou art, and get into a better temper of mind.”

[1.] “Let thy spirit be easy and pleasant; then let there be *joy* and *a merry heart* within,” *a good heart* (so the word is), which distinguishes this from carnal mirth and sensual pleasure, which are the evil of the heart, both a symptom and a cause of much evil there. We must enjoy ourselves, enjoy our friends, enjoy our God, and be careful to keep a good conscience, that nothing may disturb us in these enjoyments. We must serve God with gladness, in the use of what he gives us, and be liberal in communicating it to others, and not suffer ourselves to be oppressed with inordinate care and grief about the world. We must eat our bread as Israelites, *not in our mourning* (^{<5734>}Deuteronomy 26:14), as Christians, *with gladness and liberality of heart*, ^{<4025>}Acts 2:46. See ^{<5737>}Deuteronomy 28:47.

[2.] “Make use of the comforts and enjoyments which God has given thee: *Eat thy bread, drink thy wine*, thine, not another's, not *the bread of deceit*, nor *the wine of violence*, but that which is honestly got, else thou canst not eat it with any comfort nor expect a blessing upon it — *thy bread* and *thy wine*, such as are agreeable to thy place and station, not extravagantly above it nor sordidly below it; lay out what God has given thee for the ends for which thou art entrusted with it, as being but a steward.”

[3.] “Evidence thy cheerfulness (v. 8): *Let thy garments be always white*. Observe a proportion in thy expenses; reduce not thy food in order to gratify thy pride, nor thy clothing in order to gratify thy voluptuousness.

Be neat, wear clean linen, and be not slovenly.” Or, “*Let thy garments be white* in token of joy and cheerfulness,” which were expressed by *white raiment* (^{<6604>}Revelation 3:4); “and as a further token of joy, *let thy head lack no ointment* that is fit for it.” Our Saviour admitted this piece of pleasure at a feast (^{<4807>}Matthew 26:7), and David observes it among the gifts of God’s bounty to him. ^{<4205>}Psalm 23:5, *Thou anointest my head with oil*. Not that we must place our happiness in any of the delights of sense, or set our hearts upon them, but what God has given us we must make as comfortable a use of as we can afford, under the limitations of sobriety and wisdom, and not forgetting the poor.

[4.] “Make thyself agreeable to thy relations: *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*. Do not engross thy delights, making much of thyself only, and not caring what becomes of those about thee, but let them share with thee and make them easy too. Have a wife; for even in paradise *it was not good for man to be alone*. Keep to thy wife, to one, and do not multiply wives” (Solomon had found the mischief of that); “keep to her only, and have nothing to do with any other.” How can a man live joyfully with one with whom he does not live honestly? “Love thy wife; and *the wife whom thou lovest* thou wilt be likely to *live joyfully with*.” When we do the duty of relations we may expect the comfort of them. See ^{<4109>}Proverbs 5:19. “Live with thy wife, and delight in her society. *Live joyfully with her*, and be most cheerful when thou art with her. Take pleasure in thy family, thy vine and thy olive plants.”

(2.) The qualifications necessary to this cheerfulness: “Rejoice and have a *merry heart*, if *God now accepts thy works*. If thou art reconciled to God, and recommended to him, then thou has reason to be cheerful, otherwise not.” *Rejoice not, O Israel! for joy, as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, ^{<3801>}Hosea 9:1. Our first care must be to make our peace with God, and obtain his favour, to do that which he will accept of, and then, *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy*. Note, Those whose works God has accepted have reason to be cheerful and ought to be so. `Now that thou eatest the bread of thy sacrifices *with joy*, and partakest of the wine of thy drink-offerings *with a merry heart*, now *God accepts thy works*. Thy religious services, when performed with holy joy, are pleasing to God; he loves to have his servants sing at their work, it proclaims him a good Master.

(3.) The reasons for it. “Live joyfully, for,”

[1.] “It is all little enough to make thy passage through this world easy and comfortable: *The days of thy life* are the days of *thy vanity*; there is nothing here but trouble, and disappointment. Thou wilt have time enough for sorrow and grief when thou canst not help it, and therefore *live joyfully* while thou canst, and perplex not thyself with thoughts and cares about tomorrow; *sufficient to the day is the evil thereof*. Let a gracious serenity of mind be a powerful antidote against the vanity of the world.”

[2.] “It is all thou canst get from this world: *That is thy portion* in the things of *this life*. In God, and another life, thou shalt have a better portion, and a better recompence for thy labours in religion; but for thy pains *which thou takest* about the things *under the sun* this is all thou canst expect, and therefore do not deny this to thyself.”

2. Let us apply ourselves to the business of life while life lasts, and so use the enjoyments of it as by them to be fitted for the employments:

“Therefore *eat with joy and a merry heart*, not that thy soul may take its ease (as ⁴⁰⁷⁹Luke 12:19), but that thy soul may take the more pains and the joy of the Lord may be its strength and oil to its wheels,” v. 10.

Whatsoever thy hand finds to do do it with thy might. Observe here,

(1.) There is not only something to be had, but something to be done, in this life, and the chief good we are to enquire after is *the good we should do*, ⁴⁰⁸⁰Ecclesiastes 2:3. This is the world of service; that to come is the world of recompence. This is the world of probation and preparation for eternity; we are here upon business, and upon our good behaviour.

(2.) Opportunity is to direct and quicken duty. That is to be done which *our hand finds to do*, which occasion calls for; and an active hand will always find something to do that will turn to a good account. What must be done, of necessity, our hand will here find a price in it for the doing of, ⁴⁰⁷⁶Proverbs 17:16.

(3.) What good we have an opportunity of doing we must do while we have the opportunity, and *do it with our might*, with care, vigour, and resolution, whatever difficulties and discouragements we may meet with in it. Harvest-days are busy days; and we must make hay while the sun shines. Serving God and working out our salvation must be done with *all that is within us*, and all little enough.

(4.) There is good reason why we should *work the works of him that sent us while it is day, because the night comes, wherein no man can work*,

John 9:4. We must up and be doing now with all possible diligence, because our doing-time will be done shortly and we know not how soon. But this we know that, if the work of life be not done when our time is done, we are undone for ever: “*There is no work to be done, nor device to do it, no knowledge for speculation, nor wisdom for practice, in the grave whither thou goest.*” We are all going towards the grave; every day brings us a step nearer to it; when we are *in the grave* it will be too late to mend the errors of life, too late to repent and make our peace with God, too late to lay up any thing in store for eternal life; it must be done now or never. The grave is a land of darkness and silence, and therefore there is no doing any thing for our souls there; it must be done now or never, John 12:35.

ECCLESIASTES 9:11-12

THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF HOPES

The preacher here, for a further proof of the vanity of the world, and to convince us that *all our works are in the hand of God*, and not in our own hand, shows the uncertainty and contingency of future events, and how often they contradict the prospects we have of them. He had exhorted us (v. 10) to do what we have to do *with all our might*; but here he reminds us that, when we have done all, we must leave the issue with God, and not be confident of the success.

I. We are often disappointed of the good we had great hopes of, v. 11. Solomon had himself made the observation, and so has many a one since, that events, both in public and private affairs, do not always agree even with the most rational prospects and probabilities. *Nulli fortuna tam dedita est ut multa tentanti ubique respondeat* — *Fortune surrenders herself to no one so as to ensure him success, however numerous his undertakings.* Seneca. The issue of affairs is often unaccountably cross to every one's expectation, that the highest may not presume, nor the lowest despair, but all may live in a humble dependence upon God, from whom every man's judgment proceeds.

1. He gives instances of disappointment, even where means and instruments were most encouraging and promised fair.

(1.) One would think that the lightest of foot should, in running, win the prize; and yet *the race is not always to the swift*; some accident happens to retard them, or they are too secure, and therefore remiss, and let those that are slower get the start of them.

(2.) One would think that, in fighting, the most numerous and powerful army should be always victorious, and, in single combat, that the bold and mighty champion should win the laurel; but *the battle is not always to the strong*; a host of Philistines was once put to flight by Jonathan and his man; *one of you shall chase a thousand*; the goodness of the cause has often carried the day against the most formidable power.

(3.) One would think that men of sense should always be men of substance, and that those who know how to live in the world should not only have a plentiful maintenance, but get great estates; and yet it does not always prove so; even *bread is not always to the wise*, much less *riches always to men of understanding*. Many ingenious men, and men of business, who were likely to thrive in the world, have strangely gone backward and come to nothing.

(4.) One would think that those who understand men, and have the art of management, should always get preferment and obtain the smiles of great men; but many ingenious men have been disappointed, and have spent their days in obscurity, nay, have fallen into disgrace, and perhaps have ruined themselves by those very methods by which they hoped to raise themselves, for *favour is not always to men of skill*, but fools are favoured and wise men frowned upon.

2. He resolves all these disappointments into an over-ruling power and providence, the disposals of which to us seem casual, and we call them *chance*, but really they are according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, here called *time*, in the language of this book, ~~2001~~ Ecclesiastes 3:1; ~~4815~~ Psalm 31:15. *Time and chance happen to them all*. A sovereign Providence breaks men's measures, and blasts their hopes, and teaches them that the way of man is not in himself, but subject to the divine will. We must use means, but not trust to them; if we succeed, we must give God the praise (~~2043~~ Psalm 44:3); if we be crossed, we must acquiesce in his will and take our lot.

II. We are often surprised with the evils we were in little fear of (v. 12): *Man knows not his time*, the time of his calamity, his fall, his death, which, in scripture, is called *our day* and *our hour*.

1. We know not what troubles are before us, which will take us off our business, and take us out of the world, what *time and chance will happen to us*, nor what *one day*, or a night, *may bring forth*. It is *not for us to know the times*, no, not our own time, when or how we shall die. God has, in wisdom, kept us in the dark, that we may be always ready.

2. Perhaps we may meet with trouble in that very thing wherein we promise ourselves the greatest satisfaction and advantage; as the fishes and the birds are drawn into the snare and net by the bait laid to allure them, which they greedily catch at, so are the sons of men often *snared in an evil time*, when it falls suddenly upon them, before they are aware. And these things too *come alike to all*. Men often find their bane where they sought their bless, and catch their death where they thought to find a prize. Let us therefore never be secure, but always ready for changes, that, though they may be sudden, they may be no surprise or terror to us.

~~2013~~ ECCLESIASTES 9:13-18

THE ADVANTAGES OF WISDOM

Solomon still recommends wisdom to us as necessary to the preserving of our peace and the perfecting of our business, notwithstanding the vanities and crosses which human affairs are subject to. He had said (v. 11), *Bread is not always to the wise*; yet he would not therefore be thought either to disparage, or to discourage, wisdom, no, he still retains his principle, that *wisdom excels folly as much as light excels darkness* (~~2013~~ Ecclesiastes 2:13), and we ought to love and embrace it, and be governed by it, for the sake of its own intrinsic worth, and the capacity it gives us of being serviceable to others, though we ourselves should not get wealth and preferment by it. This wisdom, that is, this which he here describes, wisdom which enables a man to serve his country out of pure affection to its interests, when he himself gains no advantage by it, no, not so much as thanks for his pains, or the reputation of it, this is the wisdom which, Solomon says, *seemed great unto him*, v. 13. A public spirit, in a private

sphere, is wisdom which those who understand things that differ cannot but look upon as very magnificent.

I. Solomon here gives an instance, which probably was a case in fact, in some neighbouring country, of a *poor man* who with his wisdom did great service in a time of public distress and danger (v. 14): *There was a little city* (no great prize, whoever was master of it); there were but *few men within it*, to defend it, and men, if men of fortitude, are the best fortifications of a city; here were *few men*, and, because few, feeble, fearful, and ready to give up their city as not tenable. Against this little city a *great king* came with a numerous army, and besieged it, either in pride, or covetousness to possess it, or in revenge for some affront given him, to chastise and destroy it. Thinking it stronger than it was, he *built great bulwarks against it*, from which to batter it, and doubted not but in a little time to make himself master of it. What a great deal of unjust vexation do ambitious princes give to their harmless neighbours! This *great king* needed not fear this *little city*; why then should he frighten it? It would be little profit to him; why then should he put himself to such a great expense to gain it? But as unreasonable and insatiably greedy as little people sometimes are to *lay house to house, and field to field*, great kings often are to lay city to city, and province to province, *that they may be placed alone in the earth*, ^{<238>}Isaiah 5:8. Did victory and success attend the *strong*? No; there was found in this little city, among the few men that were in it, *one poor wise man* — a wise man, and yet poor, and not preferred to any place of profit or power in the city; places of trust were not given to men according to their merit, and meetness for them, else such a wise man as this would not have been a poor man. Now,

1. Being wise, he served the city, though he was poor. In their distress they found him out (^{<210>}Judges 11:7) and begged his advice and assistance; and *he by his wisdom delivered the city*, either by prudent instructions given to the besieged, directing them to some unthought-of stratagem for their own security, or by a prudent treaty with the besiegers, as the woman at Abel, ^{<216>}2 Samuel 20:16. He did not upbraid them with the contempt they had put upon him, in leaving him out of their council, nor tell them he was poor and had nothing to lose, and therefore cared not what became of the city; but he did his best for it, and was blessed with success. Note, Private interests and personal resentments must always be sacrificed to public good and forgotten when the common welfare is concerned.

2. Being poor, he was slighted by the city, though he was wise and had been an instrument to save them all from ruin: *No man remembered that same poor man*; his good services were not taken notice of, no recompence was made him, no marks of honour were put upon him, but he lived in as much poverty and obscurity as he had done before. *Riches were not to this man of understanding, nor favour to this man of skill.* Many who have well-merited of their prince and country have been ill-paid; such an ungrateful world do we live in. It is well that useful men have a God to trust to, who will be their bountiful rewarder; for, among men, great services are often envied and rewarded with evil for good.

II. From this instance he draws some useful inferences, looks upon it and receives instruction.

1. Hence he observes the great usefulness and excellency of wisdom, and what a blessing it makes men to their country: *Wisdom is better than strength*, v. 16. A prudent mind, which is the honour of a man, is to be preferred before a robust body, in which many of the brute creatures excel man. A man may by his wisdom effect that which he could never compass by his strength, and may overcome those by out-witting them who are able to overpower him. Nay, *wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive, v. 18. *Wisdom*, that is, religion and piety (for the wise man is here opposed to a sinner), is better than all military endowments or accoutrements, for it will engage God for us, and then we are safe in the greatest perils and successful in the greatest enterprises. *If God be for us, who can be against us* or stand before us?

2. Hence he observes the commanding force and power of wisdom, though it labour under external disadvantages (v. 17): *The words of wise men are heard in quiet*; what they speak, being spoken calmly and with deliberation (though, not being rich and in authority, they dare not speak aloud nor with any great assurance), will be hearkened to and regarded, will gain respect, nay, will gain the point, and sway with men more than the imperious clamour of him that *rules among fools*, who, like fools, chose him to be their ruler, for his noise and blustering, and, like fools, think he must by those methods carry the day with every body else. A few close arguments are worth a great many big words; and those will strike sail to fair reasoning who will answer those that hector and insult *according to their folly*. *How forcible are right words!* What is spoken wisely should be spoken calmly, and then it will be heard in quiet and

calmly considered. But passion will lessen the force even of reason, instead of adding any force to it.

3. Hence he observes that wise and good men, notwithstanding this, must often content themselves with the satisfaction of having done good, or at least attempted it, and offered at it, when they cannot do the good they would do nor have the praise they should have. Wisdom capacitates a man to serve his neighbours, and he offers his service; but, alas! if he be poor his wisdom is despised and *his words are not heard*, v. 16. Many a man is buried alive in poverty and obscurity who, if he had but fit encouragement given him, might be a great blessing to the world; many a pearl is lost in its shell. But there is a day coming when wisdom and goodness shall be in honour, and the *righteous shall shine forth*.

4. From what he had observed of the great good which one wise and virtuous man may do he infers what a great deal of mischief one wicked man may do, and what a great deal of good he may be the hindrance of: *One sinner destroyeth much good*.

(1.) As to himself, a sinful condition is a wasteful condition. How many of the good gifts both of nature and Providence does one sinner destroy and make waste of — good sense, good parts, good learning, a good disposition, a good estate, good meat, good drink, and abundance of God's good creatures, all made use of in the service of sin, and so destroyed and lost, and the end of giving them frustrated and perverted! He who destroys his own soul destroys much good.

(2.) As to others, what a great deal of mischief may one wicked man do in a town or country! One sinner, who makes it his business to debauch others, may defeat and frustrate the intentions of a great many good laws and a great deal of good preaching, and draw many into his pernicious ways; one sinner may be the ruin of a town, as one Achan troubled the whole camp of Israel. The wise man who delivered the city would have had his due respect and recompence for it but that some one sinner hindered it, and invidiously diminished the service. And many a good project, well laid for the public welfare, had been destroyed by some one subtle adversary to it. The wisdom of some would have healed the nation, but, through the wickedness of a few, it would not be healed. See who are a kingdom's friends and enemies, if one saint does much good, and one sinner destroys much good.