

A Poor Man Saves the City

By Elder David Pyles

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. – Eccl 9:13-18

Since most of Solomon's writing were expressly purposed to praise wisdom and teach it, the fact that he would distinguish the wisdom here as "great" should capture the attention. The story has deep meaning, both from a spiritual and a natural point of view. When Solomon said the wisdom "seemed" great unto him, the meaning was that he sensed something profound in the story that not even he fully grasped. However, a New Testament Christian should be in a better position to see the depth of its meaning.

On the spiritual side, the story is an implicit prophecy. The inhabitants of the city are the people of God. The powerful besieging king is Satan in his unrelenting assault against man, seeking vengeance against him for the supremacy he was given as one created in God's own image. The poor man whose wisdom delivered the city is Jesus Christ. Solomon marveled that this man was not appreciated for what He did. While Christianity is the world's largest religion, the greater marvel is that it is not the world's *only* religion, and even among professed Christians, the value and extent of Christ's achievements are not fully appreciated. Perhaps the story also anticipates the case of the Jews in particular, who typically dismiss Jesus Christ on very account of the fact that He was poor, crucified, etc.

The story also has important natural lessons. It complains of the tendency of men to underestimate the true value of knowledge and wisdom to a society. Most people in those times, and for many centuries thereafter, were caught up in an economic doctrine that tended to measure the wealth of a nation by its stockpiles of gold and silver. Ancient people went to great lengths to explore the world largely because of their lust for these metals. Numerous wars were also occasioned by this, and these likely served to motivate them even further. Gold and silver enabled one to wage war, and war enabled one to take a larger shares of the world's

gold and silver. The poor man was unappreciated because he was neither a man of gold nor was he a man of war.

Economic doctrine would see radical change in 1776 when a man named Adam Smith wrote a book entitled "The Wealth of Nations." Smith would become known as the father of economics on account of this brilliant book. He ably argued that the true wealth of a nation is not in its gold and silver, but in the wit and work of its people, or in what economists sometimes call "human capital." A nation with knowledgeable, industrious people will prosper. A nation with ignorant and slothful people will languish. As for gold and silver, a nation having vast reserves of such can buy many swords and shields, but what is that against a nation clever enough to build a single machine gun?

The truth of Smith's position can be readily seen in the modern world. Some of the poorest nations are very rich in natural resources. Some of the richest nations are very poor in natural resources. Most poor nations seem to be locked in the iron grip of their poverty. Other nations can be bombed into oblivion only to rise again. The difference is in the mind, not in the mine.

The greatness of a nation therefore derives from a wise philosophical foundation. In absence of this, a rich nation will soon become a poor one. A philosophy founded on ideas that man is an evolved animal, whose morality is malleable and whose principles are rooted in nothing higher than himself, has repeatedly proven a recipe for mediocrity in the best case and ruin in the worst. It is also a self-contradicting philosophy because it has the effect of reversing the very evolution it assumes. Similar results can be expected of philosophies founded in religion and superstition contrived by men. Calling such manmade religions "Christian" will do little to help. The city will triumph against the besieging king only if it hearkens to the wisdom of the poor man from Galilee. The facts of experience corroborate this, and the American people should be the first to bear witness.