

Job 28 – Where can wisdom be found?

Introduction

Most of you will know the story of the Book of Job. Job was a godly, upright man who sought to live a life pleasing to God. God, if I may express it this way, even boasted of Job in the courts of heaven: "Have you considered by servant Job?" And God blessed him with wealth and family. But then, in a short time, he lost his wealth and all his children died in a disaster. And then he lost his health. His wife, it seems, then threw him out of the house and he ended up sitting on the local rubbish dump scraping his boils with a piece of broken pottery.

The book poses the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" – but we are not going to attempt to answer that question this evening.

As Job sat on his pile of ashes, three of his "friends" came and sat with them. After silently keeping watch with him for a while, they began to question and counsel Job. This book is part of the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament – concerned with practical wisdom that seeks to discover the way this world, God's world, works. Job's three friends are well versed in wisdom – or so they believe. They argue that God is omniscient; he sees everything that human beings do and even the thoughts of their hearts. And God is omnipotent; he is all powerful and is in control of all that happens in the world. Furthermore, God is righteous and just, so it stands to reason that he will reward the righteous with prosperity while judging the sinner whose life offends him.

Each of Job's friends try in turn to show him the wisdom of their arguments, suggesting perhaps that Job has harboured secret sins even if he lived an outwardly righteous life. And each time, Job sought to answer them by protesting his own innocence. Job also believes that God is righteous in all his ways, but this only adds to Job's pain; he cannot understand why God is inflicting all this suffering on him.

After 24 chapters of Job's friends offering him their misplaced wisdom, Job has had enough. He has come to see that for all their claims to wisdom, his friends are pitifully lacking in understanding. True wisdom, wisdom that can speak into the pain of his unmerited suffering, is difficult to find. The cry of Job in this chapter is, "where can wisdom be found?" (v.12). Where can he find someone who will speak wisely and helpfully to him in all his brokenness and pain?

And in framing this question, Job provides us with a wonderful piece of poetry, full of beautiful symbolism, born of his pain and deep feeling.

Let's look then at this chapter:

Celebrating human capability and discovery

Job begins by celebrating human ingenuity, capability and discovery in verses 1-11.

He talks about the different metals that are mined from the earth – gold, silver, copper and iron – and of the different ways each needs to be processed. Human beings have discovered all this. He talks of precious or semi-precious stones that are found hidden in the depths of the earth. None of these things are easy to find. They are hidden even from the eagle-eye of the bird of prey; no beast of the earth sets its foot on them (vv. 7-8). But they are discovered by humans who dig their mines into the depths of the earth, with all their shafts and tunnels. They dangle and sway on their ropes (v. 4), turning the darkness to light with their candles and torches (v. 5). They will even tear their way through rock to find their treasures (v. 9). They are so diligent and persistent in their painful searching that nothing remains hidden from them. They even follow the courses of underground streams in their searches (v. 11).

Job is recognising that human beings have amazing abilities in discovering what is hidden, particularly when it is considered to be something of value. They will go to extraordinary lengths to search it out and dig it out. We, in our day, could add so many more examples of human ingenuity and discovery. We have sent out probes to explore the reaches of our solar system, sending back extraordinary pictures of things previously unseen. We have explored the depths of the sea with the discovery of organisms that can live in super-heated water and manganese nodules on the deep seabed, rich in valuable metals. We have discovered the structure of DNA – the so-called code of life – and have mapped the human genome... Human discovery and ingenuity seems to know no bounds. Is anything beyond human fathoming?

Well yes, this is Job's point in verse 12. Humankind may seem able to search out the deep secrets of the universe – "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?"

Wisdom is more valuable than gold, silver and rubies

In verses 13-19 Job argues that wisdom is more valuable than gold, silver and rubies.

What makes gold so valuable? It is valuable because it is beautiful and does not decay, but above all it is valuable because it is rare, it is hard to find. Wisdom is far more valuable because it is far more difficult to find.

The problem is that people do not comprehend the worth of wisdom (v. 13), else they would diligently seek it out as they seek jewels from the ground and scour the sea for fish. But wisdom cannot be found hidden in the earth or even in the depths of the sea, nor can it be bought in the marketplace with fine gold or precious jewels.

So Job concludes this section with the same question, "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?" (v. 20). It seems to be hidden beyond any human discovery (vv. 21-22).

God alone is the source of wisdom (vv. 23-28)

But Job's question does not go unanswered. There is, says Job, one who knows where wisdom can be discovered. God is the one who created all things and he is the one who understands all things. He is the one who possesses all wisdom.

I have vivid memories of school assemblies when I was at secondary school. One of the hymns we often sang was "Immortal, invisible, God only wise. In light in accessible hid from our eyes..." I'm not sure that we were wise enough to understand the words we were singing, but the phrase "God only wise" is an inversion of the apostle Paul's description of God as "the only wise God" (Romans 16:27), an echo of Job's affirmation that God alone is the source of wisdom.

So, only God knows where wisdom is to be found since he is the source of wisdom. But, and here is the most important point, God has not left wisdom beyond human discovery. God himself has declared where wisdom is to be found, "he said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28) And in this, of course, Job echoes so much of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament with its repeated refrain, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

The Bible's view of wisdom is very different from what passes as human wisdom in our world – it does not mean being intelligent or clever and it is not measured by exam passes or degrees. The wisdom the Bible talks about is available to the simplest of souls. It is wisdom to live by even when you do not understand what is going on in the world or in your own life, nor understand why it is happening. It is the wisdom that is exemplified in Job rather than in the clever arguments of his friends.

God has shown his wisdom in creation and in wisdom he governs the world that he has made. We may not understand the ways of God but we can trust him. As someone has written: "Wisdom is not a matter of understanding why suffering happens; rather, true wisdom is a matter of knowing the God who knows why suffering happens." It is the wisdom that trusts and obeys.

Beyond Job to Jesus

I want to take you now beyond Job to the pages of the New Testament, to God's ultimate revelation of himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we see the very mind and purposes of God. And when the apostle Paul writes about the gospel, the good news of what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, he writes about the wisdom of God displayed in him. Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25;

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

The apostle Paul tells us that the wisdom and power of God are displayed in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This does not seem to be wisdom or power as the world thinks of these things. Here is Jesus, a man like no other man, holy and righteous. Here is a man of whom what was said of Job is supremely true – he feared God and shunned evil. Here is one of whom the Father could boast in the courts of heaven, "Have you considered my Son, my beloved Son?"

And yet he was despised and rejected. He was taken captive as the result of a conspiracy between the Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities and was hung upon a cross to die in agony and shame. He the righteous and sinless one suffered as no one had suffered before, not even Job. How can this be the wisdom of God?

The wisdom of God defies every human expectation. The cross displays the wisdom of God because it secures the redemptive purposes of God – as the resurrection demonstrates. For it is here, by *this* means, that God is putting a broken world to rights: dealing with sin and the devastation it has brought upon God's world; bringing in a new creation and making all things new through Jesus Christ.

No wonder then that, having surveyed God's plan of salvation spanning all of human history, his plan to save both Jew and Gentile and make them one new people in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul concludes Romans 11 with a hymn of praise to the wisdom of God:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
'Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?'
'Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?'

For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory for ever! Amen.

And our hearts gladly echo the "Amen!"

Here is wisdom; wisdom at which angels would stand with mouths agape if it were not that they cannot cease their praise of so great a God and so wonderful a Saviour.

So here is the answer to Job's question concerning where wisdom is to be found. The apostle Paul speaks of Jesus as the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 3:2). This is where you must mine for wisdom, for Jesus Christ "has become for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption."

You want to know where wisdom is to be found? It is found in Jesus Christ and in what God has done for us in him. Do you want to have wisdom? Have Christ. Without him your life will have no meaning and make no ultimate sense, no matter how much you seek to exercise your brains to understand it. But knowing him you possess wisdom from God, and that is enough. It is enough to know Christ.

Do you know him?

True wisdom is knowing and trusting God in Christ

But even for the Christian – perhaps *especially* for the Christian – there will be many things we do not understand. There will be times when we feel like Job and find ourselves crying out, "Why O Lord? Why do bad things happen to good people and to innocent people?"

There are many things we do not understand, but we understand this: God has given his Son for us. His righteous suffering was like none other the world had ever witnessed. And we know that through his suffering and death, God has acted to put the world to rights. We know that through his resurrection from the dead God has begun the work of new creation – making the world anew so that there will be no more suffering, no more pain, no more death, no more loss, no more tears, for God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. We know that we shall at last see God in all his glory, and his glory will be reflected in all he has made. And then, there will be an end to all questions and the overwhelming and joyful affirmation by all the universe that our God has done all things well. Then we shall know of a certainty what we now affirm by faith: "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

And in the meantime, in a world still marked by injustice and pain, a world in which there is much we do not understand, we can trust God, trust him absolutely because he gave his Son for us, and we face no pain that he has not faced before us. This is a trust that does not deny the pain, for it cannot deny Christ. It is a trust that fully acknowledges the pain, feeling it acutely, but trusting God in the midst of it – knowing that Christ is with us in it and suffering in and with us still.

Nor is this trust a form of fatalism – "What will be, will be." Rather, it is our willing and joyful "Yes and amen" to God who, in Christ, has done all things well. It is our continuing reaffirmation of our commitment to him and his new-creation purposes. It is following Christ in the path of discipleship.

Where is wisdom to be found? It is seen supremely in the wisdom of God displayed in what he has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no greater wisdom than to know him, to trust him and to follow him and to place our hope in him.