



THE EYE OF THE STORM- WHERE IS WISDOM FOUND?

Text: Job 28

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Recently with Hurricane Harvey and Irma we have seen the devastating power of hurricanes. Our hearts go out to those who have lost so much. Now, the thing about hurricanes is that while their winds are ferocious and devastating, the eye of the storm is completely calm. After the storm center has passed the winds rage again. I mention this because, in a sense, that is what we have here in Job 28. We can say a storm has been raging between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. We have seen what their interactions have been like over the past few weeks. We saw Job complain bitterly to God because of his terrible suffering. He lost all his property, all his kids, his own health. He just wanted to die and cursed the day of his own birth. First Eliphaz took him to task, speaking from his mystical experience. He said if Job was suffering he must have sinned badly. Because only those who do wrong suffer. Bildad said the same sort of thing from his approach of tradition. And the third friend, Zophar, repeated that theme from a common-sense position. They all kept hammering him. 'God is righteous and just. You are suffering, so you must have done wrong. Confess it and all will be well'. But each time Job protests his innocence. He has been righteous. It's God who had been harsh to him. In speech after speech no one budges from their position. Right up to chapter 27 the argument continues. Eliphaz has a go and Job replies. Bildad has a go and Job replies. Zophar has a go and Job replies. So it keeps going for three rounds. (Three rounds? That sounds like a boxing match!) The arguments get hotter and blunter. The three friends talk past Job. At no stage do they listen to what he is saying.

In the end on the third round Bildad in disgust only has a five-verse speech. And Zophar doesn't even bother. Note the bluntness with Bildad in chapter 25. *"Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven. Can his forces be numbered? On whom does his light not rise? How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his eyes, how much less a mortal, who is but a maggot—a human being, who is only a worm!"* In other words, Bildad says to Job, 'You are a maggot, a worm. Only God is righteous. Even the moon and stars are dim in comparison. So how can you, a maggot, have the guts to say you are righteous before God!' Note the sarcasm as Job replies in chapter 26:2-4. *"How you have helped the powerless! How you have saved the arm that is feeble! What advice you have offered to one without wisdom! And what great insight you have displayed! Who has helped you utter these words? And whose spirit spoke from your mouth?"* The tension between Job and his friends is terrible. In the rage of the argument no one has convinced the other of anything. The friends have not managed to bring one iota of wisdom to Job's situation. Does this sound like some of the arguments we get into? The longer an argument goes the more heated it gets. It descends into insults thrown around with sarcasm dripping from our lips.

And now, suddenly, here with chapter 28 we find ourselves in the eye of the storm. All is calm. It is like a commercial in the dramatic moment of the TV movie. Here the writer of Job, stops the drama. The voice here is not that of Job or his three friends. It is the writer asking the all-important question that neither Job nor his friends have gotten a handle on. We have here a majestic hymn to 'wisdom'. The vital question is seen twice in the refrain (:12 & 20) *"Where then can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?"* It's like the writer says: 'It's time to take a step back and cool off. Time for some objective reflection.' It's like someone intervening in our ugly argument and sitting us down to stop and think for a moment. Chapter 28 provides a breathing space between the cycle of speeches between Job & his three friends and the cycle that follows. The second cycle is between Job & a new character Elihu and the cycle with God. In this pause the writer begs the question: Where is wisdom in all this?

The key thing in this chapter is understanding what 'wisdom' is. The Hebrew word for 'wisdom' is 'chokmah'. It means to be highly skilled. It was used to describe the skill of the artists, or weavers who made exquisite decorations for the tabernacle. The word also

meant to have great skill in making good decisions in life so that you lived well. Wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. So, wisdom is much more than just knowledge. You can be a maths genius and still make stupid life decisions. It's been said 'If you lack knowledge you go to school. If you lack wisdom, get on your knees.' Or as another person quipped 'We can get information 'on line' (Google). But wisdom is from 'on high' (God).' Wisdom in the Bible knows how to make the best out of life because it follows God's ways. And since God created everything, he knows best how it all works. So, wisdom, ultimately is about living obediently to what God says.

Chapter 28 of Job, is a search for wisdom that is compared to a search for precious metals and stones. The writer is saying wisdom won't be found and can't be, no matter how far you dig. Job should know. He has been driven to find wisdom. The first part of this beautiful poem acknowledges the genius of human beings. It does so by admiring the skill of the miner. In verses 1-6 there is reference to the refining of silver and gold, the digging of iron ore, the smelting of copper, the mining of sapphires. The writer shows the persistence and ingenuity of human beings as they can get to these precious metals. (:3) "*Mortals put an end to the darkness; they search the farthest recesses of ore in the blackest darkness*". If the writer of Job were writing his book today he would speak of the skills we have in modern surgery, our communication technology with mobiles, satellites, and the internet. The author goes on to show (:7&8) how human skill and knowledge goes way past that of the animals. Even the keen sight of the falcon and the courage of the lion fail to match the skill and courage of the miner digging for treasures from deep in the ground. What courage and sheer ingenuity we humans have to be able to go to the very roots of a mountain and get the hidden treasures (9-11). We are indeed marvelous creatures. And so we should be, since we have been made in God's image! Bildad's assessment that a man is a '*maggot*', a '*worm*', is not right. God has given human beings the ability to research and investigate, to dream and design, to be creative in art and music. Our status and abilities in the creation are of the highest order.

And yet, despite all that, the author asks in verse 12 "*But where is wisdom to be found? Where does understanding come from?*" Here he reflects on what would be the main theological question of the book of Job. Where can wisdom be found? Despite all the great technical genius and research skills no one knows where wisdom is. We can

be so intelligent and life skill inept at the same time. I'm sure we have all noticed that. How many unwise decisions people make. How sad that is! Says verse 13 we don't even understand wisdom's worth. The deep powers of creation don't know (14). Wisdom cannot be bought or exchanged, no matter what precious metals and jewels you have (15-19). The answer to the question: "*Where does wisdom come from?*" (20) escapes us human beings because, you see, true wisdom is not of this world. Note 21-22 "*It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumour of it has reached our ears.'*" The reality is that only God knows the way to wisdom (23) "*God understands the way to it, and he alone knows where it dwells.*" That's because he sees everything under the heavens. The source of wisdom lies in God who is all-knowing (23), all-seeing (24), and all-powerful (25). It is the wisdom of the one who made it all. (26-27). God's Word is the revealed 'know-how' of the One who knows how. God knows how because he gave everything its how. God knows best how everything works because he made it.

So, the writer says in the final verse (28) "*The fear of the Lord- that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.*" In other words, when you know God and are in deep awe of him, then you get wisdom. That's when you get a real handle on life. Being in awe of God you see life's true meaning and purpose. This makes sense, doesn't it? If God has created everything, he more than anyone should know what is wise and what is foolish. Only God can truly know the best way to live in his creation. Of course, if you don't accept there is a God this approach to wisdom is scoffed at. But where does it leave you? If there is no God then life is just random chaos. There is no reason for anything. There is no one behind the wheel. Stuff happens. John Calvin said, 'To search for wisdom apart from Christ means not simply foolhardiness but utter insanity'. Really, the best way to negotiate life is by living in reverent submission to the One who made us. "*The fear of the Lord- that is wisdom.*" In other words, true wisdom is a gift from God. It is not something we find by ourselves. It is given to us when we come to God through Jesus. Through faith in Jesus we are reconciled to God. And Jesus said, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. Through Jesus we understand God's character, and respect that his ways are the best ways.

So, what does all this say to Job? What has this got to do with his terrible suffering and all the questions he has been struggling about with God? Well, basically this. There is more to life than we can understand through our experience. There is more to

wisdom than even we can understand with the best of our science and technology. There is a different way of looking at everything. And that is, from God's perspective. That's the perspective of the one who made it all. God sees everything '*under heaven*', whereas we only see a very small part. There is more to Job's suffering than Job himself will ever know. What is needed is a new beginning to our understanding. Job 28 emphasizes the idea that true wisdom is not a matter of knowing why suffering happens. Rather true wisdom is a matter of knowing God, who knows why suffering happens. The appropriate way to approach suffering is not to seek an explanation for it. But to seek to know God better through the experience. Because knowing God is infinitely better than not suffering. If I have never suffered, and don't know God, I am so much worse off than if I have suffered, but through it have come to know God.

What we have in this final verse of chapter 28 is not only the climax of the chapter that has been asking '*Where does wisdom come from?*' It is also the lesson of the entire book of Job. The book revolves around the idea that if we want to live life to the full, it is not a matter of knowing why things happen. It's not about getting all our questions answered, like why do the innocent suffer? To truly live life, it's a matter of knowing God, who knows why things happen. "*Fear of the Lord- that is wisdom*". Knowing God, trusting him, living in obedience, that is wisdom. The wise person cannot necessarily explain why everything in life happens. But the wise person is in a right relationship with God. And because of that trusts that God has good reasons for not revealing the answers to why we suffer. We as parents don't tell our children everything about life when they are little. We know they have to grow up before we can tell them certain things. It won't be till we are in eternity with God that we will see things from God's perspective and appreciate the why of our suffering. At the moment, we see life from the bottom of the tapestry. It seems like there is no rhyme or reason. But from God's perspective it is a beautiful work of art. To be wise we need to be humble and teachable, in awe of God and his ways. As Proverbs 11:2 puts it "*...with humility comes wisdom*".

So, chapter 28 stands as a warning to any further speculations and speeches from Job's three friends. Getting a true insight to Job's suffering, does not come from below. It won't come from Eliphaz or Bildad's ideas, from their experience or tradition, nor the common sense of Zophar. It must come from above as a gift from God. That serves to highlight the importance of Jesus. Jesus is himself the revealing of God's wisdom.

Especially in his crucifixion do we see the wisdom of God. In defiance of all worldly wisdom God chose to save people through the suffering of Jesus. Through the suffering of a truly innocent man, through a suffering that makes even Job's suffering pale into insignificance, God has brought the way of reconciliation. In Jesus, we are brought into God's family. And with that everything that is his is ours. In Christ, we have everything we need to know for life. In Jesus, we know God and his intentions. Everything God does stems from his grace and is for the ultimate wellbeing of his children. True wisdom trusts God in that.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

- Explain the difference between intelligence and wisdom.
- Explain what is meant by: wisdom is not about knowing why suffering happens, but knowing God who knows why suffering happens.
- Do you know what it is to 'fear the Lord'? How is it seen in your life? What 'wisdom' has it brought?