

Where Wisdom Is Found

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[0 : 0 0] Have you ever experienced an unexpected key change when you're listening to a song and it makes you kind of, it jolts you a bit and you're jarred a little bit and it makes you prick up your ears? Sometimes that's happened in our church by accident rather than intentionally.

But a key change in a song can re-grab the listener's attention whereas they might otherwise have started to drift off. And what we have in the book of Job here is quite a sudden and unexpected key change when we come to chapter 28. In fact, in the Bible here the translators have put in a little heading saying interlude, interlude, as if it's, you know, a little break between the other things that are happening in the book of Job. But it's more than an interlude, I would say. And it's a very deliberate key change that helps us in the midst of all the heat of the book of Job, to step back and to meditate with Job, who we take to be the one speaking here, as to where wisdom comes from, where understanding comes from. And as I've said, that's not just some academic subject for Job. That's of vital importance to him because he's trying to figure out in the midst of everything that's happened to him why it's happened. So wisdom to him is a life and death thing and not simply something that you might have in an academic discussion or forum or something like that. And I would submit to you that if you haven't valued wisdom or maybe undervalued wisdom, this chapter makes it pretty clear just how valuable wisdom is to believers in God. Does it not?

I mean, it's like skywriting, isn't it? Saying, wisdom is priceless. Wisdom is priceless. And you need this. This wisdom isn't optional for you in your life. If you're a Christian, it is of unsurpassable value to live in wisdom. And what the passage is also saying is that if you're not yet a believer, in Jesus, you may have plenty of knowledge of another sort and may indeed be extremely clever, but you do not have wisdom biblically defined because that only comes from the one who has access to wisdom, the living God, the God who reveals himself through the pages of Holy Scripture.

And we're going to take this passage tonight in four sections. Firstly, looking at verse 1 to verse 11.

And it's set out in the Bible here in these portions. But what does verse 1 to 11 speak of? It's really beautiful, isn't it? It's written in poetry. This is Hebrew poetry that we're reading here.

[3 : 5 0] It's beautiful, isn't it? Stunning language and arresting imagery to capture and to entice the imagination. But what's it speaking about? Mining. Right? It's largely talking about mining.

Why? Well, it's an illustration. It's an image of the lengths to which human beings will go to obtain that which they deem to be valuable. Yeah? The lengths they will go to, the effort that they will expend in order to get something that they think is of value. Because look at the lengths they go to.

The way it's described is showing the amazing achievement and ingenuity of human beings in order to accomplish this thing that is impossible for other animals or other creatures to do. To bore into the earth, into the dark recesses of the earth, into the dark recesses of the earth, and to find gold and silver and precious stones.

The beasts of the earth on the surface of the earth, they know nothing of this. The proud eagle who flies over it all has not seen anything of this. And yet there, look at verse 4.

Far from human dwellings, they cut a shaft in places untouched by human feet. So these people are even going to places that no other human beings have been to before. But look at that image of them. Far from other people they dangle and sway. The image of this lone miner on a rope dangling in the darkness, swaying, swaying, all to find something of value. The determination, the ingenuity, the energy that the human race will put into getting value wherever it is can be found. Even if that means cutting into the earth and getting it out. And of course we're in what I think still is the oil capital of Europe where we see how that ingenuity has continued into the modern day as oil is extracted from underneath the seabed. Another example. But in Job's day,

[6 : 38] Job is one of the most ancient books in the scriptures and it speaks of a very ancient time. Job was probably around at the same time as Abraham and Melchizedek. At that time it was a very good example of human ingenuity and human endeavor after that which humans believe is the most valuable thing.

But it's no accident that it's this dark image. Why? We're in the book of Job. He's in a dark place.

As Job meditates upon his search for wisdom, this is a very apt image, isn't it? This gloomy darkness searching for a glimmer of hope in the midst of all his trials and tribulations. The man dangling there on the rope, swaying. Could well be Job as he hangs by a thread, as it were, onto his very sanity in the hope that what his situation is for will be revealed to him by God. So, in our own measure, human beings can do impressive things, can't they? And they can find things that other creatures can't. In this case, they can find them under the earth and extract them and enjoy them and behold them. But that is contrasted with verses 12 to 19. Look at verse 12. This is a refrain in the chapter which we see being repeated in verse 20. But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? So, look at man's achievements.

Isn't humanity amazing? Look at what they can do. And then this jarring question. They can find gold. They can find rubies. They can find lapis lazuli. Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Verse 13, the answer, no mortal comprehends its worth, and it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says it is not in me. The sea says it is not with me.

Man can find things that are relatively inaccessible and highly valuable, valuable. And yet, wisdom is far more valuable than these things, and it is far more inaccessible as well. And look at the value that is placed on wisdom in this passage. It can't be bought with anything. There is literally nothing you could bring of value by way of precious metal or precious stone that you can get wisdom with. And this is similar to what we read of in the book of Proverbs as well, placing such a high value on wisdom.

[10 : 11] And again, the language is just stunning. As Job repeats seemingly this stream of valuable things and says wisdom just does not compare with that. Now, Job was a rich man, had been. And yet, he's saying, what I need now is not all my cash back and all my stuff returned to me. What I really need now is wisdom. I need understanding. That is of far greater value than any of the possessions I was once externally, materially, materially blessed with.

Let's check ourselves and our own hearts and our own desires against that contrast that's just been made there in these first two sections of Job. That is, what do we spend our time and our energy and our focus and our ingenuity trying to get? Is it wisdom? If we look at our lives and how we've prioritized our lives, where our values lie, is wisdom right up there? Or are the equivalents of gold and silver and precious stones what we're actually seeking? Or at least spending more time and energy seeking. God's Word would have you reorientate those priorities if they are topsy-turvy and would have you realize the inestimable value of wisdom, of wisdom. Wisdom in the Bible is not just knowing stuff. Wisdom is act.

Wisdom is doing. Wisdom is knowing what to do in a given situation. It's not something you just think about in a kind of pointy-headed way. It is absolutely rock-solid practical. It's what helps you to live the good life, to live the right life, a life, a life, a life to the full, a life where you are living as you ought, because wisdom is knowing what God's will for you is and what God would have you do or say or think in any given situation. That's why it's valuable, right? It's what enables you to live your life properly. That's why it's priceless.

And yet we live in an ever more materialistic, consumeristic age where wisdom of this kind is devalued at the expense of stuff and getting things that we want.

They are very alluring, just as these wonderful precious stones were very alluring to these ancient miners, but they do not compare with wisdom. So has that re-established in our minds and in our hearts the value of wisdom, or is it starting to? And is it starting then to push out idols that may be in our hearts that value other things more than wisdom? We go on to the third block, the third section, which is verse 20 to 27. And again, it opens with that refrain.

[14 : 04] Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing. Okay, so we've worked out that human beings can do lots of impressive things in order to get that which they value. But wisdom is in a whole other order of that. It can't be accessed in that way and it's far more valuable. But now we experience the frustration of saying, well, if it's so valuable, where is it? Where can I find it? And again, don't detach this from the story of Job.

I need to find it. I'm going crazy because I can't find it. And my friends are goading me with allegations that the reason all these terrible things have happened to me is because I must have sinned in some way against God and he's punishing me.

I don't believe that is the case. I need to know where wisdom can be found. And we read that it is concealed. It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, even the birds in the sky, even destruction and death only have heard whispers. They don't really know. They've just heard the faintest echo that, yes, maybe wisdom exists somewhere. And in verse 23, we get a very, very humbling but beautifully reorienting revelation. God understands the way to it. And he alone, he alone knows where it dwells.

The exclusive knower of where wisdom is, is God. It's interesting, isn't it, that Job says God understands the way to it.

And he alone knows where it dwells. Because God in himself is wisdom. But Job describes it here as being something that can be distinguished from God. God knows the way to it. He alone knows where it dwells.

[16 : 38] For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. We then are treated to a wonderful picture of God's creative acts.

When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters. When he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm. Then he looked at wisdom and appraised it. He confirmed it and tested it.

A very important thing to know with regards to knowing. A very important thing to know with regards to knowing is that there is a wisdom that belongs to God alone.

And cannot be accessed by us. The only one who has perfect knowledge of God God is God. The only one who can fully comprehend God is God. And we, even in our glorified state that is when the new heavens and the new earth comes we will not be able to fully comprehend God because God is infinite and eternal and we still will not be.

We had a beginning. We had a beginning. And we are bound in certain ways. There is a certain knowledge that is for God and for God alone.

[18 : 04] And part of wisdom is accepting that. Part of wisdom for a human is realizing there is one who knows all things and only one.

All things and only one. Now, in the case of Job an extraordinary providence has come upon him under God's overruling counsel.

And he has allowed this to happen to Job for his own good purposes. And what this is helping us to see is that in our own life circumstances the only one that knows all the ins and outs of it is God.

We can never see through all of providence and work out why everything happens in this world. And trying to do it will drive us mad. And so, we let God be God with regards to the mystery of providence and trust and know that he is sovereign and he does know all things and is working out all things according to his wise, good, and holy purposes.

Always. He works all things according to the counsel of his own will, Paul tells us in Ephesians. All things, not some things, all things.

[19 : 32] So, God is the keeper of wisdom. God alone has perfect wisdom. wisdom, but there is a wisdom that man can obtain, that human beings can obtain.

There is a wisdom that is for us that God is pleased to grant us. We've just seen the extent to which human beings will go to get what they value.

We've then seen just how much more valuable wisdom is. We've then seen that only God has perfect and complete and comprehensive wisdom because he is God and we are not.

And now we are seeing, now we are being told how we can have the wisdom that is for us, the wisdom that God would have for us, so that we can live rightly in this world.

Where does it come from? What is the key? Verse 28. It's Job 28, verse 28. And he said to the human race, he has told us this, he is telling you this, where is wisdom?

[20 : 43] The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding. Wisdom is directly related to our posture before the only wise God.

If we would make ourselves God, if we would reject God, we will not have wisdom, biblically defined. But, if we are to fear God, fear the Lord, that is wisdom.

Let's take a moment or two, I know I'm going on rather long, but we need to take a moment or two, we need to take a moment or two, to address this word, fear. Because fear has very negative associations, doesn't it?

Let's face it, it does. Fear sounds very, very unpleasant and not to be desired generally, doesn't it?

That is true. What the Bible means by fear here in the terms of the fear of the Lord, and this is not something unique to Job, this expression, we find it in, most notably at the beginning of Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, fools despise knowledge and instruction.

[22 : 06] We see it in Psalm 111 as well, fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This fear is not the fear that would flee from God, a fear that is afraid.

Bear with me, it's not a fear that is afraid of God and would run away from Him. It's a fear that presses in to God because it sees God for who He is.

That is, a merciful God, a gracious God and a compassionate God as He is also a holy and righteous God. These things are not intention in God, they are all complementary in God.

Charles Spurgeon, and on this subject I would really heartily recommend a book that's just out by Michael Reeves called Rejoice and Tremble about why the fear of the Lord is a good thing, why it's been lost from evangelicalism over the last few decades to our great loss that we don't have this fear because it's really, really good.

But Charles Spurgeon says this is the fear that leans towards God because of His very goodness. It does not run away from Him. There is a sinful fear that if we're outside of Christ, we do see God as the judge of all wickedness.

[23 : 34] We might become, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, aware of the way in which we've sinned against Him and want to run from Him. But for the believer, the fear of the Lord is the love of God, rightly defined, as Reeves puts it.

You might have heard someone address this word fear and say, well, what that really means is blank. And I want you to think of some of the words if you have had this explained to you that have been used as a substitute for the word fear.

Okay, so think of them now. What that really means is, okay, I'm going to say awe. Awe is a word you would have been given. Reverence is another one and respect is another.

But again, as Reeves goes on to say, yes, they get at that, but they don't fully grasp the fear of the Lord. Yes, there is awe in it.

Yes, there is reverence in it. Yes, there is respect in it. But there's a being thrilled by God that the fear of the Lord does express.

[24 : 42] of finally apprehending the divine majesty in all His super abundant goodness towards sinners like us, displayed in Jesus, and being thrilled by that, of being thrilled in His presence, of being overwhelmed of all our capacities being flooded by a sense of the sheer greatness and goodness and glory of God.

It's seeing God as God. That is the fear of the Lord. And when we stop doing that, experiencing that, seeing God that way, what we do is domesticate God.

And we try and bring Him down to a manageable level where He rests, as another writer, David F. Wells, has described, God resting on the church inconsequentially.

This God is domesticated. This God is light. This God does not take sin that seriously. This God does not take salvation that seriously. This God doesn't really take anything that seriously.

This domesticated God, which we end up worshiping when we lose the fear of the Lord. But the God of the Bible, the God you want to be in relationship with, the God you want to be in right relationship with through Christ, is the one who inspires godly fear.

[26 : 20] And that is a wonderful thing, so that you can rejoice and tremble. The joy of loving and fearing God aren't conflicting things.

They are all harmonious because it's a sense of knowing who God really is. The one who created the universe, friends. The God who upholds everything from the greatest galaxies to the tiniest subatomic particles in perfect concert.

The one who is leading all things to their appointed ends by his own providence according to his own eternal decree. This one requires surely a sense of thrill and a sense of true awe before the majesty of this one.

And when you get who God is and fear God in this good way, in this joyful way, in this wonderfully edifying way, then you've got wisdom.

Then you start living your life rightly. Then you start living in light of the fact that you know the one who is the divine majesty.

- [27 : 41] He knows you and he has called you by name. And in Christ he has called you out of darkness, dangling and swaying out of that darkness and into his marvelous light.
- He has taken you out of a kingdom where you were oppressed and possessed and were enslaved to sin and has brought you into a bright and a broad land where you are now freed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live for him.
- And living in light of who the God that has done that for you is, is wisdom. You see the moral, the clear moral dimension to understanding?
- To shun evil is understanding. We would think, well, what is understanding? Well, it's a cognitive process in the break. No. The Bible is saying, yes, of course it's that.
- But spiritually speaking, it's to shun evil, it's to depart from evil. In other words, it's to repent. It's to repent. It's to turn from sin and turn to Christ.
- [28 : 57] If we had a wrong fear of God, we would not turn to him. If we have a right fear of God, we would turn to him because we see he is the one that's done everything necessary for our salvation.
- Friends, we have done terrible things against God in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions, and of course in our inactions, in all the things we don't do for him.
- And we have transgressed his holy law. And he is a God that is so good that that must be, that must be dealt with. And that's a good thing.
- Would you like a God who just blinks at evil and doesn't care? No. He will deal with it. But as a good, as a loving, as a gracious, as a merciful, as a compassionate God, he has sent his Son.
- He has sent his Son. The Word, the very wisdom of God himself. We read in this passage, he looked at wisdom and appraised it.
- [30 : 02] He confirmed it and tested it. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And he sent him into the world. The one who fully and completely feared God in that right way.
- He completely obeyed him. And the one who truly and completely had understanding because he shunned evil to the extent that he never sinned. And he sent him into the world to be our Savior.
- And it's in laying hold of him, forsaking anything else, just receiving, receiving Christ and resting in Christ for our salvation that we can finally start living wisely.
- But we must do this daily. Yes, if you're not a Christian, this is how you become one. Receive Jesus and rest in him for your salvation.
- And in him alone, not yourself plus Jesus, only him. But friends, every day, every day, we must repent and believe the gospel and repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [31 : 18] Turn from sin afresh. Confess sin afresh. Be cleansed of sin afresh. And walk in the fear of the Lord. I, as was mentioned by Mike at the beginning of the service, attended Aberdeen University many years ago.
- I was going to say studied at Aberdeen University, but that would be a stretch. Many years ago. And my life was a dissolute mess.
- And my life went from being a dissolute mess to being a more dissolute mess. Till by the time I was in my 30s, I was a hopeless cocaine addict with no money, no friends, and no nothing, no prospects.
- But it was only when I encountered Jesus and really apprehended this fear of the Lord that something that I had passed by pretty much every day, maybe multiple times every day at the University of Aberdeen, finally sunk into my heart.
- Any graduates of Aberdeen here, anyone, any current students of Aberdeen University? What's the motto? *Initium sapientie timor domini*.

[32 : 41] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is wisdom. And to shun evil, that is understanding.

And when the penny finally dropped, I, as one who had been dangling in this darkness, looking for things of value that would actually profit me nothing, compared to the value of wisdom, saw in Christ, the one in whom all the treasures of knowledge and of wisdom are embodied, my Savior.

And I trusted in Him and learned what the fear of the Lord is. And slow as I am, faltering and weak and failing as I am, by the grace of God, that is what I seek to do today and for as many days as God may grant me, to live in that way.

And I invite you to see that the fear of the Lord, the good fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. and to shun evil is understanding.

And in realizing that and in grasping that, you will be greatly blessed and just as, if not more importantly, greatly used of God in your life.

[34 : 03] We can waste our Christian lives. We can waste them. But with the fear of the Lord, we can use them well and be used of him for his glory in this life.

And I pray that would be so for all of us. Amen.