

Job 28

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[0 : 00] What is really important in life? What is of greatest value? What gives you value and worth as a person? It strikes me as I was mentioning briefly and introducing our reading this morning that these are questions that more people in Aberdeen are asking these days. For many, life has revolved around a good, well-paid job in the oil industry. For some, and I stress for some, by no means for all, but for some, their own self-worth has been in significant measure a function of being usefully employed and generously remunerated. And we know that in the last few months, for many, everything has changed. If it's not gone yet, that prized, well-paid job is hanging by a thread for many of our fellow citizens of our fair city. Just in this last week, oil dipped,

I think I'm right in saying below \$40 for a few moments as Chinese stocks plummeted. What will this week bring? Well, we don't know. Nobody knows what this week will bring.

And it's important to consider this reality in the light of God's Word. We don't gather here as Christians to escape from the reality of the real world and somehow to cotton wool ourselves in some kind of alternative reality. No, we come and we gather and we turn to God's Word to see what God has to say about the real world that we live in. And so it's important to consider this reality in the light of God's Word. It's important for us as Christians to have a clear view of what's really important, what is of greatest value. It's important for ourselves as we face unemployment or the prospect of unemployment. But it's also important as we speak to and even counsel those who are struggling as their comfortable world begins to fall apart around about them. And I want us to think about what a man called Job has to say. Job was a good man whose world, a very prosperous and comfortable world, fell apart big time. And this reality led him to reflect on what's really important, what is of most value in life. In the chapter that we read, he shares some of his conclusions. And Job identifies two distinct treasures that he has been able to witness, indeed, to own and to experience, two distinct treasures. He speaks of, in the first half of the chapter, treasure from the earth, material treasure. There in verse 10, having expounded on all the mineral wealth that he speaks of, gold and precious stones and all that can be done with them. He concludes that man's eyes see all its treasures, all the treasures to be found in the earth, all the treasures that come from the earth.

And he speaks and celebrates such a treasure. But he also identifies in this chapter another treasure, treasure from heaven, or spiritual treasure. There in verses 12 through to verse 13, where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth.

This is another treasure. It's treasure from heaven. It's spiritual treasure. But just note, before we consider these two treasures, that treasure from heaven is of great value and usefulness on earth. This is not some idea that, well, on earth we need earth's treasure, and then, well, in the blue and yonder, well, then heaven's treasure. No, on earth we need treasure from heaven.

[4 : 41] The other thing to stress before we think of these two treasures that Job speaks of is that Job is not suggesting that one of these treasures is bad and the other is good. That is not the contrast that he is drawing. Job recognizes that both of these treasures are good. Treasure from the earth is good.

Treasure from heaven is good. Both are good. But one is better, way better. One in so many ways is of far greater value than the other. And this is the argument that he presents in this poetic way in this chapter.

Well, let's think about these two treasures, treasure from the earth and treasure from heaven. Treasure from the earth is what we find in the first 11 verses of Job chapter 28. But let's do something this morning a little different. Let's bring this chapter closer to home as we reread these verses, verses 1 to 11, but reread them with an Aberdeen flavor. Now, I stress flavor, not accent, but an Aberdeen flavor. So we're going to reread these 11 verses, and it will help if you follow the reading in your Bibles.

And it will be a paraphrase reading of these verses, but you'll be able to follow the flow from what I say and what you're reading in front of you. So Job chapter 28, verses 1 to 11.

There are fields of oil and gas and a place where oil is refined. Oil and gas are taken from the deep and petrochemicals are refined from them. Man puts an end to darkness. He searches the farthest recesses for oil in the deepest oceans. Far from where people dwell, he drills a well in places forgotten by the foot of man. Far from men, he labors on platforms and drilling rigs. The sea from which fish are harvested is transformed below as by fire. Oil comes from its reservoirs, and its dust contains barrels, millions and millions of barrels of black gold. No bird of prey knows that hidden path. No falcon's eye has seen it. Proud beasts do not set foot on it, and no lion prowls there. Man's hand assaults the flinty rock and opens up the depths of the North Sea and the Atlantic. He tunnels the depths, and his eyes see all its treasure. He searches the sea bed and brings hidden things to light. His eyes, our eyes, your eyes, sees all earth's treasures, and treasures there are aplenty. And this is good. It's all good. Job is celebrating the richness of earth. He's celebrating the riches that can be extracted from the earth for our good and for our benefit. The earth is rich, and man is amazing. These maybe are the two big messages of the first half of the chapter. The earth is rich, and man is amazing. What man can do, it's amazing what man does to harvest wealth from a wealthy planet. Let's just think of these two realities that the first half of the chapter speaks of. This treasure from earth that speaks of an earth that is rich and of man that is amazing. The earth is rich, rich in treasure, and these treasures, they're for us.

[8 : 32] The treasure brings progress and wealth. Just for a moment, you don't need to be an expert in oil and gas to think for a moment of oil's uses and rewards. It fuels our industry. It runs our cars. It heats our homes. The tax revenues over these past 50 years, regardless of whether you feel they've been well used or otherwise, but the reality is that those revenues have filled succeeding chancellors' treasure chests, have built schools and hospitals and motorways, and paid for nurses and teachers and social workers, and so much more. At the more personal level, thousands and thousands of households in Aberdeen and beyond, many of us here have bought comfortable homes, raised our children, enjoyed holidays around the world, and secured, some of us in a measure, our financial future thanks to the treasures of the earth. And this is all good. It's all good.

The earth is rich. But it's not just that the earth is rich. Job just doesn't only focus on the richness of the earth. He also focuses on man's extraordinary capacity. He says, man is amazing. It's no mean feat to find and extract and refine and employ and add value to the treasures of the earth. And Job describes in fascinating, affleeting detail the different extraction techniques of ancient mining, the mining that was practiced in his day, some of which, some of these techniques still employed today. In our Aberdeen rendering of the passage, we touched on the ingenuity and industry of oil men and women who for the past 50 years or so have worked the seabed of the North Sea. What does Job recognize is needed to wrest treasure from the earth? Well, he recognizes that courage and a sense of courage and a sense of adventure are required. And he discovers that he finds this a plenty in men and women. We read in verse 3, man puts an end to the darkness. He searches the farthest recesses for old in the blackest darkness. He speaks of man dangling and swaying in the process of securing wealth from the earth. Courage and adventure. Likewise, in the North Sea, how many lives have been lost because of the great danger that accompanies the work that is done, the activity that takes place.

Man characterized by courage, characterized by wit and guile and genius. How many disciplines have been developed to an amazing degree in order to extract wealth and riches from the earth? Geology and geophysics and so many of the multiple engineering disciplines developed to a remarkable degree as man employs his wit and guile and genius to harvest riches from the earth. Man is amazing in how he is characterized by industry and innovation. Job in the passage. He speaks of opening shafts and overturning mountains and cutting channels.

I don't know if you get many votes from the green community and his overturning mountains and seemingly celebrating that fact, but leaving that to one side. But then, of course, having extracted the wealth, man refines and smelts and fashions. In the North Sea and ever deeper waters, indeed, beyond the North Sea in the Atlantic, wells are drilled and hydrocarbons extracted and transported with ever increasing efficiency and employing ever more complex subsea technology. And you know so much more about that than I do. Many of you do.

Men and women here in this city have demonstrated these amazing qualities and traits as treasure has been wrested from the deep. Man is amazing. We echo, if somewhat guardedly, the sentiments of the bard in Hamlet.

[13 : 06] What a piece of work is a man. How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in action, how like an angel, in apprehension, how like a god, the beauty of the world, the paragon of creatures. It's all good.

Treasure from the earth is good. It's good, but. There's always a but. Well, there's not always a but, but there's often a but. It's good, but. Here's the rub. Treasure from the earth is good, but limited.

When we think of our own reality here in Aberdeen, it runs out. The North Sea, don't we know it, is a declining basin. The wealth runs out. It's not going to be there forever. There is a limited, finite supply of these resources that Job celebrates.

Its value is fragile. Its value is fragile. How we know it here in Aberdeen in relation to oil. Less than a year ago, Brent crude, worth well over a hundred dollars a barrel now, less than half of that amount.

Its rewards are unevenly spread and cruelly lost. Even in times of boom, not all benefit from it. And in times of bust, how many lose out from its rewards. But even more critically, as we acknowledge the limitations of treasures from the earth, we have to recognize that though treasure from the earth can and does bring wealth and comfort and progress, it does not bring happiness and security and purpose.

[14 : 56] For that, another treasure is required. Treasure from heaven. And what is that treasure from heaven? Let's move on and see what Job has to say about this other treasure that comes from another direction. Not from below, not from the earth, but from above, from heaven.

What is this treasure? Well, Job identifies this treasure as wisdom. Verse 12, But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

What is wisdom? Wisdom is about living life well. Now that is a somewhat tantalizing definition as it leaves perhaps more unsaid than said.

Living life well can mean very different things to different people. Depending on your presuppositions and where you're coming at the question from, what does living life well mean? Let me just give you one example.

A rather crude example in many ways, but it highlights how our conception of living life well can be so very different. The example is of very different conclusions that people reach about living life well and particularly in the light of the very fleeting nature of our existence.

[16 : 24] We're here today and gone tomorrow. How does that impact on how we view living life well? Well, Ashley Madison, I'm sure you've heard of Ashley Madison, the website for those seeking an adulterous affair.

What's its slogan? It's a very clever slogan. Life is short. Have an affair. The starting point is a realistic recognition that life is short.

We agree with that. Life is short. Now the Bible reflects on that same reality that life is short. What does the Bible do? The Bible urges us to pray. Teach us to number our days aright.

Yes, life is short. That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Two philosophies of life. Grounded or that begin from the same starting point.

Very different conclusions. Very different perspectives on living life well. That's a little tangent in a way. Let's stick with this working definition of wisdom as living life well.

[17 : 33] If we want to live life well, we need to get wisdom. Few words are better than many, and it's difficult to beat the words of Solomon. Directed to his son in the book of Proverbs, chapter 4 and verse 5, he says this, Get wisdom.

Get wisdom. But where can wisdom be found? This is the question that Job ponders on. He acknowledges its great value, but where can we find it?

It's not easy to find. Listen to what he has to say from verse 12 through to verse 14. But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth.

It cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, the very source of wealth from the earth. The deep says, it's not in me. The sea says, it's not with me.

Where can it be found? The very source of the earth's treasure playfully mocks us as we search for wisdom. Don't look here, the deep says.

[18 : 40] Don't look here, says the sea. You'll find oil, you'll find gold, you'll find precious stones, but you won't find wisdom here. What is wisdom worth?

If we can't find it, perhaps we can purchase it. Well, there's no luck there. What does Job recognize from verse 15? It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver.

It cannot be bought with the gold off here, with precious onyx or sapphires. And he goes on in different ways and with different images, making the same point that we can't buy it.

Its value is way beyond what we could secure from earth's treasures. It is of such value that no price will suffice.

We've been brought up, or we're very much under the influence of the idea that everything has a price. Everyone has a price. We maybe think that that's true of everything. Everything has a price.

[19 : 47] For those of you interested in football, you'll know that the transfer window is about to close. I think it's tomorrow. And there are many footballers who are being stopped by wealthier teams.

And the general view of the pundits is, well, everybody has a price. So there's one guy who plays for Everton. Chelsea want to buy him. And the view is, well, there's a price. If they just offer 5 million more or 10 million more, there will come a point, despite all their protestations to the contrary, that the player will be sold because everybody has a price.

Everything has a price. And Job says, well, maybe that's true of gold and silver and footballers, but it's not true of wisdom. There's nothing you can pay to buy wisdom.

You might begin to wonder, well, does it even exist, this wisdom that Job speaks of? If we can't find it, what worth is it? If we can't find it, if we can't purchase it, if we can't buy it, does it even exist?

Don't we all just have to make the best of what we've got? Is there really something better out there somewhere? In verse 22, we have the intriguing description of a rumor circulating about this mercurial treasure called wisdom.

[21 : 06] Destruction and death say only a rumor of it has reached our ears. A rumor of wisdom. Yes, we've heard of something called wisdom, but it's just a rumor.

We don't know if it really exists. But yes, there's a rumor out there that there is such a thing as wisdom. I wonder if that picture and that reality, even of men and women, in their material-bound lives, sometimes just taking a step back and pondering, isn't there something more?

Isn't there something of greater value? I hear a rumor that there may be something out there that can satisfy in a way that I'm not satisfied.

How can I get wisdom? How can you get this great treasure? Let's assume for the moment that it does exist.

Where can you get it? Well, that is what Job goes on to consider and develop in what follows in the chapter from verse 23.

[22 : 18] God understands the way to it, and he alone knows where it dwells. God knows where wisdom is, where wisdom is to be found.

For wisdom, we don't look down into the depths of the earth, but up to the heights of heaven. Wisdom comes from above. God is the one who is altogether wise.

In God, there is a marriage of power and wisdom that is poetically described in the verses that follow from verse 24 through to verse 27.

God views the ends of the earth. He sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters by his creative power.

When he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm. Then he looked at wisdom, his own wisdom, and appraised it. He confirmed it and tested it.

[23 : 12] Power and wisdom in intricate cooperation in the person and work of God.

So God is altogether wise and knows where wisdom is to be found. But will he tell us? Will he tell us? Well, in a word, yes. He does tell us.

The chapter ends in verse 28. And God said to man, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. And to shun evil is understanding.

The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. What does that mean? Is that not perhaps a rather disappointing answer?

To fear God. If that's wisdom, maybe I don't want it. We need to understand what it means to fear God. The word fear is here being used in the sense of deep reverence and respect for God.

[24 : 11] To fear God is about a relationship with God. It is about knowing God and living in relationship with God in the light of that knowledge of God.

Wisdom is about a right relationship with God. To fear the Lord is about a right relationship with God. That is grounded in humble reverence and joyful submission.

From this knowledge of God, this respect for God, flows a life well lived. From this wisdom we learn humility and joyful obedience.

From this wisdom flows contentment in the assurance that the God we know and respect does all things well. But how can I get it, this wisdom?

How can I enter into a right relationship with God? How can I know God and enjoy a right relationship with Him? How can I get wisdom? Job can only take us so far.

[25 : 22] We need to look to the one that Job is pointing towards when he speaks of wisdom. We need to look to Jesus. The Bible tells us that the wisdom of God has been revealed to us in a person.

God has revealed Himself to us in the person of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the wisdom of God. Listen to what Paul says as he writes to the believers in Corinth.

This is in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians. And we'll read verses 23 and 24 and then jump through to verse 30. 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.

And Paul goes on, it is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Jesus is the wisdom of God. Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. Jesus, and note this well in the light of what we've said that wisdom is.

[26 : 45] A right relationship with God. Feeding the Lord is the right relationship with God. Jesus is the one who can secure for us that right relationship with God that is the foundation of wisdom and living life well.

And what Paul says as he writes to the Corinthians, Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. What does that mean? That is, Paul says, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Jesus is our righteousness. He is the one who secures our right standing before God by securing for us forgiveness of sin by his death on the cross and clothing us with his perfect righteousness.

That right relationship with God that is at the heart of wisdom secured for us by Jesus, the wisdom of God. Jesus is our holiness. He is the one who enables us to live lives that are pleasing to God and a blessing to others to live life well.

Jesus is our redemption. He is the one who has secured our present and future salvation, which in turn allows us to live life in the confident assurance that come what may, we are safe and secure under the loving shadow of the Almighty.

[28 : 14] What do you need to do? It's not enough to admire Jesus as the wisdom of God. You need to embrace Jesus as your wisdom, trust in him as your Savior, submit to him as your Lord.

Lord, treasure from earth is good, but limited. It cannot secure you happiness, ultimate security, true and grounded hope, treasure from heaven, a right relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ is better, way better.

It grants to those who find it, who find him happiness and security and hope. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that your word is true. We thank you that it is a word that is powerful, that brings life to us. We pray that you would help us to have your perspective on what is important, on what is valuable.

We thank you for the riches that you have provided for us of different kinds. We thank you for the riches of the earth that we can exploit and enjoy and profit from.

[29 : 35] But we thank you very especially for riches from heaven, for a wisdom that is from above, for your wisdom, the wisdom of God that is taking on flesh in the person of your son, Jesus Christ.

And we pray that he would be, for all of us, our wisdom, our Savior, and our Lord. And we pray in his name. Amen.