

Job 28 – “Behold, the Fear of the Lord – *That Is Wisdom*”
Psalm 104
James 1

May 6, 2012

For years I have repeated what my seminary professor told me:
Job 28 is the key to understanding what the book is about.

But only now, as I preach through Job, do I really appreciate how right he was!

Job 28 can be summarized in its beginning, middle, and last lines:
Surely there is a mine for silver...
but where shall wisdom be found?
...the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom
and to turn away from evil is understanding.”

Job’s friends have been trying to explain how the universe fits together.
They came to comfort him in his affliction.
How do you comfort someone who has lost everything?
One approach is to help your friend see how all that has happened to him
fits into the pattern of the universe.
I think that it is safe to say that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar
were all long-time friends of Job’s.
They had engaged in similar conversations for years.
And until now, Job would have agreed with their general approach to wisdom.
Since God is just, therefore the wicked perish and the righteous prosper.

Eight times the friends have tried to persuade Job to hold fast to traditional wisdom theology.
And eight times Job has replied –
steadily moving further and further away from their position –
but closer and closer to the truth.

Now, in his final reply, Job provides his own account of how the universe fits together.
Last week, we looked at Job 26-27.
We saw that Job 26:1-4 set up the whole of the passage
by asking, “what power, what wisdom, whose words?”
and then the rest of Job 26 shows the power of God revealed in the creation;
and in Job 27 Job speaks the truth about God and man, with the breath of God.

Job’s Wisdom – How to Think about the Universe as a Wise Man (ch 26-28)
What Power? What Wisdom? and Whose Words? (v1-4)

1. **The Power of God Revealed in the Creation (26:5-14)**
 - a. **“Under the Waters” – the Realm of the Dead (v5-6)**
 - b. **“Over the Void” – the Realm of God’s Throne (v7-9)**
 - c. **“The Face of the Waters” – Between Light and Darkness (v10-13)**
 - d. **“The Outskirts of His Ways” – God’s Power Is Beyond Comprehension (v14)**

2. The Breath of God: Speaking Truth about God and Man (ch 27)

a. God Is Just and I Am Righteous (v2-6)

b. God Will Cut off the Wicked – as You Know (v7-23)

3. The Wisdom of God: Do You Dig It? (ch 28)

Now, in chapter 28, Job will speak of wisdom –
the place where power and word come together.

In chapter 28, Job says that wisdom is beyond the grasp of mortals.

We – together with Job’s friends – are used to thinking of wisdom as accessible to all.

We have all known ‘wise’ unbelievers – skilled in thinking, knowing, and doing.

But what do you say when someone says,

‘Yeah, I believe in God, but God hasn’t done right by me!’

Job’s friends would reply – “how dare you say that!

God always does what is right!”

But Job would reply, “You may be right – it may be that God hasn’t done right by you...

Yet.

But though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.

Even though God has pursued me and driven me to the ground,

I will fear him, and turn away from evil.

Because even though it looks like God is against me –

even though I have no way to stand against God –

I know that I have no place else to go!

And so I will bring my complaint to him.

I do not claim that I can explain everything.

I do not pretend to have all the answers.

But wisdom is only found with God.

It is *never* the path of wisdom to curse God!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 104.

Psalm 104 reflects the same picture of the universe that we saw last week.

Psalm 104 speaks of the wisdom of God as it is revealed in the creation –

but Psalm 104 also connects the creation with the new creation,

as it asks God to purify the earth by consuming the wicked,

and making all things right in the end.

Psalm 104

James 1:1-18

What is wisdom?

Before we talk about how to find it –
we should probably know what we are looking for!

Wisdom is best defined as knowing *how* to live in God's world.

Wisdom is at the intersection of knowledge and skill.

The wise man knows what is right.

And what is more, the wise man knows *how* to do what is right.

And still more, the wise man actually *does* what is right!

There are scholars who know an immense amount of information –
but immense knowledge is not wisdom.

There are craftsmen who are technically precise –
but technical precision does not require wisdom.

Job's three friends are impeccably orthodox in their theology;
they are skilled in argumentation and debate;
but they are not wise,
because they do not know how to apply their knowledge and skill to Job's situation.

So wisdom is both knowing *how* to live in God's world,
and the practical implementation of that knowledge.

In other words, wisdom is the most important thing you can have.
If you have wisdom, you have everything.
If you lack wisdom, you have nothing.

But where do you find wisdom?

a. The Big Dig: the Quest for Wisdom as a Quest for Hidden Treasure (v1-11)

28 *"Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold that they refine.*

² *Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore.*

³ *Man puts an end to darkness
and searches out to the farthest limit
the ore in gloom and deep darkness.*

⁴ *He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives;
they are forgotten by travelers;
they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro.*

⁵ *As for the earth, out of it comes bread,
but underneath it is turned up as by fire.*

⁶ *Its stones are the place of sapphires,^[a]
and it has dust of gold.*

Most scholars have thought that verses 1-11 are talking about ancient mining operations
but some have suggested that the overall context of verses 1-11
is more of a travel narrative than a mining operation.

After all, there wasn't much mining going on in either Israel or Edom.
So the "farthest limit" in verse 3 may be a horizontal reference
as Job speaks of man's explorations to the ends of the earth.

We know from other ancient near eastern cultures
that kings often claimed to be the "first discoverer" of distant lands and places.
(Shalmaneser III inscribed his name in a tunnel at the source of the Tigris River,
and then bragged about it when he reached home.)

If you try to make verse 4 fit the mining motif, it is rather difficult to translate.
It works better if you approach verses 1-11 as describing
"a brash venture to the edge of the world
to obtain precious objects from the watery depths"
(Jones, Rumors of Wisdom, 37).

In fact, the word translated "ore" in verse 3 – the "ore in gloom and deep darkness"
is simply the Hebrew word for "stone" (*eben*).
Man is searching for the "stone of gloom and deep darkness" –
the hidden things in the remote wastelands of the earth.

We saw last time how Job described God's power revealed in the creation.
The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants.
Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering.

In chapter 26, at the beginning of his speech,
Job had spoken of God's power – and God's understanding.
In chapter 27, he then spoke of the wicked,
who go down into the pit.

Now Job speaks of those who embark on a quest for the most precious and desirable of things.
Whether digging down or exploring out –
the point is that man is engaged in a quest.
Whether Shalmaneser seeking for the sources of the Tigris,
or Columbus seeking for a western route to the Indies,
man has always sought to "go where no man has gone before"!

Verse 6 connects with the idea of the quest for the hidden city motif:
"Its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold."
Whether the lost city of El Dorado –
or the great city of Atlantis – Numenor sunk beneath the waves –
everyone wants to find that city.

But

⁷ “*That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.*

⁸ *The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it.*

Neither bird nor beast knows that path.

If you think of this as a mining expedition,
then this is just an obvious statement.
Birds and beasts do not mine.

But the word for path suggests a footpath through the mountains
(not to be confused with a road, or way, or other well-traveled route).

Job seems to be speaking of a footpath beyond the inhabited world –
beyond even the realm of birds and beasts.

In the ancient world, the birds of prey and the beasts inhabited the waste lands
that surrounded the civilized lands.

Domestic animals – flocks and herds – populated the inhabited lands.

Wild beasts, serpents and lions, and birds of prey,
inhabit the “wilderness” – the uninhabited lands around.

But what lies beyond the uninhabited lands?

There are many ancient texts that talk about lands “beyond” –
and many ancient kings claimed to have explored lands where no bird had flown –
where no beast had roamed.

Job had spoken in 26:11 about the “pillars of heaven” –
which referred to the great mountains at the ends of the earth.

Now he speaks of a quest to the ends of the earth –
a quest in search of hidden treasure beyond the reach of ordinary men.

Job is not just talking about a place where no bird or beast has gone before.
Job speaks of a place where no *man* has gone before.

The Assyrians and Babylonians had spoken of these sorts of quests.
Later it will be taken up by the Greeks, Romans,
and in the middle ages it would continue with the Franks, British, and Spanish.

Modern historians often assume (with cynicism) that explorers just wanted money.
But when you look at how many people *died* on these voyages,
money cannot explain why they did it.
Ferdinand Magellan wanted to be the first man to circumnavigate the globe.
So he took five ships with 237 men.

Magellan himself died half way around.
Only one ship with 18 men actually made it all the way.
Another 17 men survived.
So 202 men – including Magellan – died.

If these men wanted to make money – there was doubtless a better way!
Every one of them knew that the odds of survival were slim.
But the everlasting glory of being the *first* to circumnavigate the globe
trivialized any possible danger.

In verses 9-11 Job goes on to say that in his quest for hidden treasure
man brings all sorts of things to light:

⁹ “*Man puts his hand to the flinty rock
and overturns mountains by the roots.*
¹⁰ *He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.*
¹¹ *He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle,
and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.*

Certainly mining is included here!
But also damming a stream in order to see the hidden things in the streambeds.

But the chief image in verses 9-11 is water coming out from a rock.
We have often seen that when you use creation language,
Exodus language is not far behind!
You might say that Job is not an Israelite – so how could he use Exodus language?
But the author of Job *is* an Israelite!
And, what is more, Job does not use *explicitly* say that water comes from the rock.
Rather, the *images* that Job uses would cause *Israelites* to think of Moses.

The language of this passage has lots of parallels to Deuteronomy 8,
where Moses told Israel that God was giving them a land
“in which you will eat bread without scarcity,
a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper”
because the LORD “led you through the great and terrifying wilderness,
with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water,
who brought you water out of the flinty rock” (8:9, 15)

So Job’s language of the great quest of discovery
is closely tied up with Moses’ language of the Exodus –
of Israel’s great quest seeking the Promised Land.

Man, in his quest of discovery,
will go to great lengths to bring hidden things to light.

We have delved deep into the structure of the atom,
and discovered how to unleash its immense power.
We have looked deep into the heavens and discovered things our grandparents only imagined!

And our efforts to tame creation invariably affect the way we think about redemption.
When problems occur – when trouble comes –
we look to science and technology to save us.
If only we could perfect this technique,
we would live longer, happier lives!

In digging and building, and exploring and discovering,
man has an insatiable appetite for more, and newer, and faster, and bigger...
in other words – we think that *if only we perfect this technology,*
if only we perfect this system of government – this model of education,
then life will be better!

b. Not in the Land of the Living: How Much Is Wisdom Worth? (v12-19)

¹² “*But where shall wisdom be found?*
And where is the place of understanding?
¹³ *Man does not know its worth,*
and it is not found in the land of the living.
¹⁴ *The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’*
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’

But where shall *wisdom* be found?
Man is really good at exploring the earth.
He can dig deep and discover all sorts of precious things.
He can build and explore and count and measure...

but “man does not know” the value of wisdom;
and, what is more, wisdom is not found in the land of the living.

In other words, while man is exploring, and digging, and building,
while humanity is trying to figure out all the precious and valuable things on earth,
in the seas, and in the heavens,
he will *never find wisdom*.

The deep – the *tehom* – the waters under the earth – says “Wisdom is not in me.”
The sea replies “wisdom is not with me”

In all the realm that God placed under man’s dominion in Genesis 1-2,
you will not find wisdom.

Unbelievers may accumulate impressive knowledge of the way the world works.
Non-Christians will often have remarkable skill and craft –
but in all the realm of man’s dominion,

you will not find wisdom.

Job looks at the whole world-view of his friends and says –
the whole thing is broken,
because you are trying to find wisdom in created things.

Yes – God has revealed himself in the created order!

This is what Paul talks about in Romans 1:18-25 –

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,
who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes,

namely, his eternal power and divine nature,
have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world,
in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him,
but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man
and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity,

to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie
and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator,
who is blessed forever! Amen.”

Everyone *knows* God.

The eternal power and divine nature of God
are clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

Everyone perceives them.

You cannot escape the knowledge of God revealed in the creation.

But this knowledge does not result in wisdom!

Because at the same time, they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

Verses 15-19 then explore the value of wisdom:

¹⁵ *It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.*

¹⁶ *It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.*

¹⁷ *Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.*
¹⁸ *No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.*
¹⁹ *The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.*

Think of all the most valuable things in the world –
they cannot compare with wisdom.

You think gold is valuable?
The price of wisdom is beyond pearls and diamonds and all the gold in Ft Knox!

In other words – if you are looking for a quest –
if you want to pursue that which is more valuable than anything else –
pursue wisdom!

But how can you pursue it if it cannot be found on earth?

c. Not Under the Earth: the Realm of the Dead (v20-22)

²⁰ *“From where, then, does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?”*
²¹ *It is hidden from the eyes of all living
and concealed from the birds of the air.*
²² *Abaddon and Death say,
‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’*

In verses 20-22, Job reaches back to what he said about Sheol and Abaddon in 26:6.

Not only is wisdom not to be found in the land of the living,
but neither is wisdom to be found in the realm of the dead.

even Abaddon (Destruction) and Death
have only heard the rumor of wisdom with their ears.

The birds and the beasts cannot show you the way to wisdom.
You will not find wisdom in the land of the living –
neither will you hear it in the realm of the dead!

If you cannot find wisdom either in life or in death – where can you find it!?

Finally, in verses 23-27, Job explains that only God knows the place of wisdom.

d. God Knows the Place of Wisdom (v23-28)

²³ *“God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.*
²⁴ *For he looks to the ends of the earth*

and sees everything under the heavens.
²⁵ *When he gave to the wind its weight
and apportioned the waters by measure,*
²⁶ *when he made a decree for the rain
and a way for the lightning of the thunder,*
²⁷ *then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.*

Verses 23-27 connect the themes of word, wind, power, understanding, thunder –
that we saw last week in chapters 26-27.

The one who created the world is the one who knows the place of wisdom.

Here's the irony.

There *is* wisdom revealed in creation.
You cannot *find* wisdom in creation –
it is not *found* in the land of the living –
but when God gave the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure,
he saw wisdom and declared it.
When God made a decree for the rain and a way for the lighting of the thunder,
then he established wisdom and searched it out.

Wisdom is present in creation.
But *you* cannot find it there.

So the quest for the most valuable thing in the world is doomed to failure from the beginning –
because no matter where you go,
and no matter how hard you look,
you will never find it.

But, Job says in verse 28, that God says to man:

²⁸ *And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.'*

Some have objected to verse 28 as trivializing the poem.
They think that it takes a “noble agnosticism”
and replaces it with a “banal moralism.”

But there is nothing noble about agnosticism.
It's true that man, starting from himself, can never attain wisdom.
Man, starting from man, will only attain skepticism and agnosticism.
If you seek after wisdom by studying the creation,
you may attain great knowledge, and impressive skill and technique;

but you will not find wisdom!

Because the only way to live wisely and well in God's world
is to fear God and turn away from evil.

Think back to chapter 1:

Job 1:1

“There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job,
and that man was blameless and upright,
one who feared God and turned away from evil.”

Job 1:8

“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job,
that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man,
who fears God and turns away from evil?’”

Job now says unwittingly in chapter 28
precisely what God had said *about Job* in chapter 1.

And by putting these words in Job's mouth,
the author of Job shows us that Job is indeed all that God had said in chapter 1.

Does Job fear God for nothing?

(remember Satan's question?

The question that Job was forced to ask towards the end of the wisdom debate?)

What is the point of fearing God?

If the righteous die – just like the wicked.

If there is no point (in this life) for serving God,
then why fear and serve God?

Job's answer?

Because the fear of the Lord – that is wisdom!

To turn away from evil is understanding.

Wisdom has a value that is beyond all things that you can obtain in this life.

Job has nothing left –

no children, no wealth, no possession.

He is sitting in rags on the ash heap,

scratching his sores with a potsherd.

He stinks.

He oozes.

He scratches.

He rots.

But he has the *one thing* that is to be prized above all else.

He fears God.

In Job 1 God says that Job fears God and turns away from evil.

Now in Job 28, Job says that the fear of the Lord *is* wisdom,
and turning away from evil *is* understanding.

Hebrews 5:7 tells us,

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears,
to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

[The word for reverence is one of the words translated ‘fear’ in the LXX.]

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,
being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

Jesus is the one who feared God and turned away from evil.

But this is precisely why James says,

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God,
who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

To the one who believes in Jesus, God graciously gives wisdom –

he gives you the knowledge of what to do –

the skill to *know how* to do it –

and the strength *actually to do it!*

Because Christ Jesus has become for us

“wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (1 Cor 1:30)