

Where is Wisdom?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Ali. I'm the minister here. Great to see you. And if I've not had the chance to meet you yet, hopefully I'll be able to catch you after the service. That'll be great. And thanks for leading the first part of our service and reading there. We're going to dig into Job chapter 28 now. So if you do have a Bible with you or if you've got one of the blue ones within reach, it will be worth keeping it open at that chapter that we've just read.

As we continue our series through this book of Job, part of the wisdom literature in the Bible, one of the books that perhaps asks and helps us to try and get towards an answer of some of the trickiest questions of our lives and of our experience living in the world in which we live.

So often, isn't it, in our lives, it is the why questions that are the biggest questions. And perhaps especially in times of suffering, as we've been thinking about, as we've been making our way through Job.

Why did that person act that way? Why did that have to happen to them? Why did I have to go through all of this? The why questions are often the biggest questions that we wrestle with.

And yet often they're the questions that we just can't get the answers to. We're unable to see behind the scenes, as it were. We can so often see what's happened. We can kind of observe the events. We see that. But the reason behind those things, the why, is so much harder to get at.

[1 : 3 5] And that's what's been happening so far in the book of Job that we've been looking through for the last month and a bit, really. Job knows, and Job's friends know, what has happened to him. We saw that spelled out. It was there for all to see in chapter 1 and 2, where Job lost everything.

His possessions, his family, his health. We know what has happened. But the question that really has been kind of gnawing away at Job's mind ever since is why. Why has this happened to Job?

This question has been kind of raging back and forwards through these repeated cycles of advice or accusations, we might really call them, from Job's friends that we've seen over the last few weeks.

Job's friends think they know the answer to the question why. They have a very simple answer. They say, well, Job must have sinned, therefore he is suffering. But actually, we know that their answer is far too simplistic.

Job doesn't have some kind of hidden sin that he's tucked away somewhere, some cause that has brought about this effect. Life is not as simple. Life is not as black and white as that.

[2 : 4 8] This book makes it very clear to us that Job is righteous, that Job is suffering. And so Job himself has repeatedly responded, still wrestling with this why question.

And this kind of back and forward between Job and his so-called friends has made up a pretty major section right through the middle of this book, kind of from chapter 4 up until about where we are here in chapter 28.

That kind of cycle of questions and answers has now come to a close. And in chapter 28, we're in part of Job's final speech here in the book.

There's still a bit more of the book as a whole to go, but this is kind of the end of what Job is going to say. One commentator calls this chapter a pause for breath and reflection.

And I wonder if you kind of noticed that as Ross was reading it. It's a little bit different, isn't it? It's still poetry, but it's not the kind of the accusations or the defense that we've been looking at in previous chapters.

[3 : 51] Instead, it is this kind of moment of calm, of reflection, focusing again really on the big point of Job, which is getting to the heart of this why question that we all have.

And what we're reminded of here, what we're going to see here, is that actually we don't always get an answer to that question. We don't always get an answer to that why question.

We said, hopefully we said, and we're clear with that from the beginning, that Job isn't a book that is just going to solve all our problems. Job isn't a book that is just going to make our life and our understanding of everything very neat and tidy or give us some simple solution.

Job himself will never know what is behind everything that he went through. And yet I hope that while we see in this chapter that we'll never get that full picture, that actually this isn't a passage that makes us despair or say, well, what's the point?

Actually, it's a passage, it's a poem really, showing us how to live wise lives, how to live satisfied lives, how to live good lives in light of the fact that we'll never know everything.

[5 : 04] So let's dig into that. This chapter really is all about wisdom, which is living well in God's universe. And we're going to see that in three areas. It's the nature of wisdom, the source of wisdom, and finally, really the big question of the book of Job, how we can live out wisdom.

So let's have a look there. First of all, the nature of wisdom. This chapter, you might have noticed, it starts off speaking poetically, a kind of a poem within a poem. The first 11 verses, maybe not what we'd expect, a poem speaking about mining, a poem speaking about the process of kind of extracting precious metals, minerals, jewels out of the ground.

That's not what we expected to find at this point in Job. But really the message of this poem is that these incredibly valuable things, silver, gold, sapphires, these precious things, as they're called in verse 10, they're of incredible value, but they're also incredibly elusive.

They are incredibly hard to obtain. They're in deep gloom and darkness, it says, verse 3. They're in a valley far from where anyone lives, verse 4.

They're hidden, not even the bird of prey, who kind of looks down over everything, is able to see them, verse 7. The animals don't go there, verse 8. Verse 9, it says, man has to hammer through the rock, has to overturn the mountains by the roots to get them, to bring out these hidden things.

[6 : 41] So a poem about these jewels of incredible value, but which are incredibly elusive, incredibly hard to find. And the question, I suppose, we ask is, well, why is this poem here?

You know, it's fair to say mining has not been a big feature in the book of Job so far. You know, why this sudden diversion, it seems? Well, I think that becomes clear when we read on into verse 12, which says this, but where shall wisdom be found?

And where is the place of understanding? Now, really, this poem is here to say, well, you know how valuable jewels are? You know how elusive they are?

You don't just find them lying around on the floor. You don't just grab them off the pavement, that they're difficult to get hold of. It says, well, wisdom, that genuine understanding of how the universe works is even more valuable and yet even harder to find.

Even more valuable and yet even more elusive. Wisdom in the Bible is something that is kind of woven into the fabric of creation. It's like the blueprints of the universe, not just in terms of kind of physical stuff and math, but also the Bible says in terms of moral stuff, how things should be, how things should act.

[7 : 59] In the Bible, the idea of wisdom, if we had perfect wisdom, then we would have the answer to all of those why questions that we are saying are so important to us and yet so hard to answer.

But in terms of the book of Job, we could say that wisdom is really the opposite of this very small system that we've seen repeated again and again by Job's friends and even by Job himself at times.

That simple system, which still we see many people in our day, outside of the church or even inside the church as well at times. The simple system that just says, well, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.

And that way of looking at life, which kind of simplifies everything into one of those flow charts where you just say, you know, if you say yes, you get this answer. If you say no, you get this answer. It's all very simple. It's all very black and white.

There's no wisdom needed for that. And yet Job has seen, and we see in the world around us, we probably see every day, that actually that system doesn't work.

[9 : 05] It sounds nice and it's simple, but it doesn't hold true. Because innocent people do suffer. Wicked people do get ahead. There is not this kind of positive correlation between how good people are and how comfortable their lives are.

In fact, it's often the very opposite. That there has to be something more than this black and white picture, this simple, small system. And that is what wisdom is, the true foundation, the true blueprints on which the world is built.

And you can see how valuable then that is. The real answer to those why questions. And that's what we see in verses 15 down to 19, the value of wisdom. That's more than finest gold, more than onyx and sapphire, crystals, coral, pearls.

You could take all of these things that humanity is able to mine from the depths of the earth or up from the bottom of the sea. You could pile them all together, this passage says.

And still it wouldn't come close to the value of wisdom. There is nothing more valuable. And the point is, if there isn't wisdom, then there is no reason or plan or purpose or direction or justice underlying the universe.

[10 : 27] And we're left with this really hopeless situation where even to ask that question why is pointless because it's not a valid question. There is no why. If there's no wisdom, we're just left with kind of random events, just chance.

We can't find or search for any sort of meaning because there isn't any. And yet all of us, I think, deep down, we know that that's not how we live, is it? Even those who would say they have no belief in the Bible.

Even those who would say they operate out of a purely materialist worldview that only what we can see or do scientific experiments on. That is all there is.

Even people operating in that way would still accept that actually they go through life looking for a purpose. Looking for some sort of meaning. And to find that though, that there has to be wisdom.

There has to be something more. That's why wisdom is so valuable. But all this talk of its value in this kind of poetry, in these verses, is bracketed by its elusiveness.

[11 : 31] Verses 12 to 14, where is it? It's not found in the land of the living. The deep says it's not in me. And the sea says it's not with me. You can search the most inaccessible places on the planet and you will not find wisdom.

Verses 20 to 22 emphasize that elusiveness even more. From where then does wisdom come, it asks. And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air.

Abaddon and death say we have heard a rumor of it with our ears. Even these kind of extremes beyond our planet, beyond our experience, beyond life itself, don't know the answer to this question.

Where is wisdom? You could search your whole life, this passage is saying. You could study philosophy or politics or history or the sciences.

And this passage, remember, is really positive about human endeavor, about human ingenuity and bringing to light that which has been hidden. This isn't a passage that says, oh, don't bother.

[12 : 37] Don't bother looking for anything. But it is saying that however great you're learning, however widely you travel, however broad your experience, you'll never achieve this ultimate wisdom.

You'll never find the answer to all of these why questions that we have. And in some ways that leaves us perhaps feeling, does it, like we're in a bit of a hopeless situation.

You know, the true nature of wisdom, of understanding is that it's so valuable and yet it is so elusive. It's something we'll never reach. And if this chapter finished here, then that would be a pretty hopeless situation, wouldn't it?

But it doesn't. And it carries on. And having shown us the nature of wisdom, we then see the source of wisdom. The source of wisdom. And we see that in verses 23 down to 27, if you want to have a look there.

It begins by saying, verse 23, God understands the way to it. It there is wisdom. And he knows its place. Now, while wisdom is elusive for humanity, while we've heard all these questions in that passage, he's saying, where is it?

[13 : 47] Well, I don't know. Everyone's saying, well, God does know true wisdom. How does he know it? Well, we didn't from verse 24. For he looks to the end of the earth and he sees everything under the heavens.

When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then he saw it and declared it.

He established it and searched it out. God alone knows wisdom. He has built the universe upon it. It's like those blueprints, as we said.

Well, God has used those blueprints. In fact, God made those blueprints. God knows exactly how and why everything is as it is. He has that wisdom.

And you see that emphasized or kind of illustrated here in the passages. It speaks about the weather. Obviously, living in Scotland, we have a better insight than most about the unpredictability of the weather.

[14 : 46] And even with the advances of modern science and meteorology and equipment, we still can't exactly predict the weather, can we? Let alone control it. We still deal in kind of percentages.

But the wind, the waters, the rain, the thunder, the lightning, we read how God has perfect control. And they are according to his plan. They have been established by his wisdom.

And again, the point is that while we don't know the answer to all of these why questions, that God does. That actually God knows that the reasoning behind each puff of wind, each drop of rain, each flash of lightning.

If that's the case for the weather, then how much more does he know, does he understand, the reasoning behind the events that take place in and that shape our lives?

And again, just as the weather can be something that brings life and health, the rain watering the crops, or that brings destruction and suffering, the rain causing floods, So in both the good times and the bad times of our lives, God understands and knows what is going on behind the scenes, as it were.

[15 : 59] That's something we've seen throughout Job, isn't it? Even in the hardest of times, times like what Job is going through, still God knows the answer to those why questions that we so often search for.

And we're saying that wisdom is important. Wisdom of is such value because it shows there is a purpose, there is a meaning to life. All this chapter kind of affirms that that's true, and that it's God who underpins that.

We can look for meaning in life because life is built to a plan. Christopher Ashe, again, in his book that I've mentioned a few times and has been a great help to me on Job, he says it like this, that just as the physical scientist pursues the project of science, in the belief that there is order to be discovered.

So the believer lives on this earth in the conviction that it is not a chaotic universe, but one built upon a fundamental underlying and majestic order.

And that majestic order, that fundamental foundation the universe is built on is God's wisdom. He alone is the source of wisdom.

[17 : 14] And perhaps this morning that is just an encouragement that we need to hear. Perhaps it feels like our life is out of control, perhaps things happen all over the place, and all the time we just think, why on earth?

What is going on? This passage reminds us that actually there is this fundamental foundation. There is the all-wise God who is working out his purposes in our lives and in our universe.

This world is not just a random series of chance. There is that wisdom, and God alone is the source of that wisdom. So this chapter moves us along.

It says, first, wisdom is of ultimate value, but you can't reach it. And then we see in second, it says, but God is the source of wisdom. He's built the universe on it.

There is purpose, and God knows that purpose in every detail. But then there's a third and a final step, which we'll look at now, which shows us how to live out this wisdom.

[18 : 12] Let's have a look at that, how to live out wisdom. And we see that in the last verse there, verse 28. I'll read that in just a moment. But before I do that, you've all looked at it anyway now, that's fine.

Before I do that, I want to highlight what this final section doesn't say, how this final verse doesn't conclude, even though we might want it to.

Wisdom is valuable, but we can't reach it. God is the source of wisdom. But the final link in that chain is not to say, well, therefore, if we just ask God, he will answer all of our questions.

This chapter doesn't finish by saying that God is going to give us all of that wisdom. We think that would be nice, don't we? You know, we all have these why kind of questions about various parts of lives, our lives, the lives of other people, as we know and we love, especially when we or others are suffering.

Job certainly had these questions raging in his mind and dominating the pages of this book. It would be nice to think, well, actually, if we just ask God, God will give us our kind of VIP pass, open the secret door, and show us behind the scenes, and we could know everything.

[19 : 28] And yet that's not what this passage, that is not what the Bible as a whole promises. Instead, what does God say? And what does God promise? Well, we see that in the final verse of this chapter, verse 28, as we said.

And he, that is God, and he said to man, behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. And to turn away from evil is understanding.

And there is a way for us to live out wisdom. There is a way for us to be wise, to live well in this universe. That way isn't to know everything.

And that way is to trust in God, to follow him, to live for him, whatever happens. Confident that he does know everything. He does have that wisdom.

We will never have that, that full wisdom that God has, knowing that the reason and the working behind every single action that happens throughout creation, of course we don't. Our tiny little brains would just be fried, wouldn't they?

[20 : 30] But we can be wise by fearing and following the one who has all wisdom. Let me try and put that, I suppose, in a human example.

Imagine you hired a Himalayan guide to try and lead you up one of the world's 8,000 metre high peaks. That guide will know more about mountaineering than you will ever know in your whole life, or you better hope they do, or you've been ripped off.

You know, they'll understand the different types of snow and ice. They'll understand where it's safe and where it's not. They'll understand which particular routes to take at which particular times of the season.

They'll know whether this is the day to go for the summit push or not and why. They'll know all this stuff. And they might pass some of that onto you.

They might share some of that with you. I'm sure you'll learn something. But ultimately, how are you wise in that situation? How are you wise in climbing that mountain? To be wise isn't coming to know all that they know.

[21 : 32] You never will. They've been training their whole lives. But to be wise means trusting them. It means listening to them. It means following them. It means doing things how they tell you to do them.

Well, how much more with God? And not just climbing a mountain, but through the whole of life. And not just a guide who's learned this stuff, but the creator who constructed our universe in the first place.

We will never know it all. We'll never have all our whys answered. But we can trust the one who does and remain obedient to him in the midst of that.

And that, the Bible says, that, the book of Job says, is true wisdom. And in a lot of ways, that's a good summary of the message of Job. It's what we've seen from Job, that suffering does come, that suffering is part of our fallen world.

It might come in extreme ways, as it did for Job. It could also come in just more long-term, low-key ways of disappointment. Why did I not get this in life?

[22 : 42] Or why is this my lot in life? This isn't quite what I was hoping for. This isn't how I'd seen things go in. But one way or another, that suffering will come.

We frequently don't know the reasoning behind that. We don't know the why. But ultimately, whatever life throws at us, whatever we go through, our goal isn't to analyze why.

We don't need to see that reasoning behind everything. Instead, we're to stick with God and live for him through these things, through the ups and downs, the fear of the Lord.

That is wisdom. And to turn away from evil is understanding. And actually, throughout the wisdom writing in the Bible, the books of Proverbs, of Ecclesiastes, a number of the Psalms, here in Job, these parts of the Bible which are here to give us wisdom and to help us know how to live well in the complexities and the difficulties and the gray areas of life.

That repeated theme is there, the fear of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, that that is the beginning of wisdom, that that is the key to wisdom, that that is what true wisdom looks like. The fear of the Lord.

[23 : 56] What does that actually mean? Well, the fear of the Lord is not to be kind of scared of God and to try and get away from him, but it is to recognize his greatness, his splendor, his majesty, his holiness, and to respond rightly to that.

To recognize actually that we do not deserve, as Ross said at the beginning of our service together, we do not deserve to be in God's presence. We can't just kind of casually walk up to him.

He is far above and beyond us in terms of his perfection, his understanding, his holiness. In fact, the final few chapters of Job, when God appears and when God speaks, which we'll look at over the next few weeks, are all about emphasizing that, the sheer majesty of God.

And the fear of the Lord is recognizing that and responding rightly to it. Not to flee from God, but to approach him with humility, recognizing that gap between us.

And ultimately, for us, we have the fullest revelation of what it means to fear the Lord, to respond rightly to the Holy God because he has revealed that the only way to him, the only way to do that is through Jesus.

[25 : 13] In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul speaks about Christians. He prays that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The fulfillment of God's wisdom is in Jesus and the Gospel. And that means the nature of true wisdom for us, the fear of the Lord, is to trust in Jesus and that Gospel.

To know that actually whatever happens in our lives, whatever suffering we go through, whatever struggles we have, we can keep on trusting in Jesus. And we can do that with real confidence because we can know he will never let us down.

It's because Jesus suffered for us. It's because, as we've seen before as we've been going through this book of Job, that Jesus is the perfect righteous sufferer.

It's because the cross is God's wisdom, it's how he made it possible for us to be brought back to him, restored, redeemed, adopted into his family. The cross that looked like the ultimate failure, which was the ultimate in suffering and confusion as well.

[26 : 33] You know, why did this happen? Jesus' disciples say, how could this happen to Jesus? And yet once again, God knew the why. God was working out his purposes in his infinite wisdom so that people like us could be brought back to a holy God like him.

In the cross, we get actually the chance to see why that happened. We get the chance to see why Jesus suffered. God has revealed that to us in his word, the Bible.

And at other times as well, we go through hard times, we might be able to look back and understand why a situation has come around or have a good guess at that. But actually, it's that ultimate demonstration of God's love at the cross that means even in the times when we don't get the reasons, when we don't know the why, that we can keep on trusting in him in the midst of that because we have seen his love in action because he has given everything for us and will never leave us.

And we see that wisdom is fulfilled in a person. For us, the key is not always to be asking why, why, why, even though it's a question that so quickly comes to the front of our minds. And it's not wrong to kind of explore that.

But ultimately, the question for us to be asking is who? That is the only question that will satisfy us. In all sorts of areas of life, we'll never find out the reasons, we'll never see behind the scenes.

[28 : 01] But we can know the answer to the who. Who is the wisdom of God? Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God's wisdom, the key to a wise life, the one we can know and who sticks with us and offers us security even in the hardest of times.

To live wisely is to put all our trust in Jesus, to live obediently to him, whatever we face, secure that God alone has perfect wisdom.

He sees the biggest picture. He hasn't promised that he'll always share that with us. But he has promised that he'll always go through that with us. And Christ and the cross is the perfect evidence of that.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in a confusing and often difficult world where we and those we know and those we love go through hard times and suffer in ways that we don't understand.

Lord, we thank you that you are the God of all wisdom who knows all things. And Lord, we ask that you would help us to trust in you, to trust in your great love, that love that has been put into action in the gospel of Jesus Christ that means we can be forgiven, that means that we can be restored into a relationship with you.

[29 : 21] And we pray that as your people you would help us to live for you, to turn away from evil, to walk in your path even when times are hard, knowing that that is true wisdom and understanding.

That is the very best way to live. That is how we're to live according to your plan and purpose and design. We ask that whether we know you or not this morning, that in our lives you would help us to look to Jesus, whether that is for the first time or whether that is returning once again to him.

We ask that this week that hardships that we go through would not push us away from you, but rather cause us to cling all the more tightly to Jesus and to the gospel where your wisdom is shown.

Now we pray that we would help others too, right, by directing them to Jesus, to the only one who will never let us down and who will one day welcome home all those who trust in him.

Help us through your Holy Spirit in all circumstances to fear the Lord and turn away from evil and through that to live lives of wisdom and understanding.

[30 : 29] We pray all these things for the glory of Jesus Christ and in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Amen.