

Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Job 22-31
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We've been looking at the conversations between Job and his three friends, and this morning we'll see the conclusion of these conversations. There are three cycles, each following the same pattern. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, with speeches by Job in between them. This third and final round of speeches is a little different, though. Eliphaz speaks in chapter 22, and Job responds in chapters 23-24. Then Bildad gives only a very short speech (chapter 25, only 6 verses). It appears as though they have run out of things to say. Zophar doesn't speak at all in this final conversation. Indeed, they have said the same thing over and over, to no avail. Calvin said the friends have only one song, and they sing it to death. Job on the one side, and the three friends on the other side, have all hardened in their positions. Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar all assume that Job is concealing some secret sins for which God is punishing him. God deals out blessings and curses according to one's righteousness or wickedness, and therefore it must be that Job is a wicked man to deserve this suffering.

In Eliphaz's final speech he actually accuses Job of specific sin. In 22:6-9 he lashes out at Job, "For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favored man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed."

Then in verses 21 and following, he again exhorts Job to repent. "Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you remove injustice far from your tents, if you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed, then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver. For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you, and you will pay your vows. You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways."

One commentator said that this is good medicine, but given to the wrong patient.¹ We know from the beginning of the book that Job is not being punished by God due to wickedness in his life, but rather he had been singled out by God as a blameless and upright man, one who feared God and turned away from evil. It

¹ Robert L. Alden, *Job* New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman: 1993), pg. 229.

was due to his righteousness, not his wickedness, that he was being afflicted, in order to prove Satan to be wrong and to show that Job's allegiance to God was not superficial or based on God's material blessings. Job, although he struggled, would remain committed to God even when his riches were taken away, and his children were taken away, and his own health was taken away.

Job's response to the friends has been to defend his own integrity and to cry out in desperation for some explanation from God as to why these things are happening to him. He doesn't understand. He can't comprehend why God would inflict him with these pains even though he has been living a godly life. He counters the friends' arguments with the observation that in many cases the wicked prosper. For instance, in 21:7-9, "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them." Or in 24:21-22, "They wrong the barren, childless woman, and do no good to the widow. Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power; they rise up when they despair of life."

Job protests the friends' paradigm. It can't be that material prosperity and physical health indicate righteous living, while material poverty and physical suffering indicate wicked living. Life isn't that simple, Job says. There are many who are clearly living wicked lives, and yet they are not afflicted. This is the repeated struggle between the friends and Job. The friends accusing Job of wickedness. Job defending himself.

It is interesting to note a significant point of agreement between them, and that is the sovereignty of God over all of these events. It is never suggested by any of them that anyone other than God is responsible for Job's suffering. John Piper says, "It is amazing that the most common means used by people today to solve the mystery of suffering never occurred to Job or to his three friends—namely, the limitation of God's sovereign control over all things. Today we limit God at the drop of a hat (he couldn't have willed that sickness, or that explosion, or the death of that child!). So he must not be in control. He is a limited God. But Job and his friends have this great common ground: God reigns. And no solution to the problem of suffering that questions this will ever satisfy the heart of a saint."² This is made clear to the readers of this book in chapters 1-2, as we saw a few weeks ago. Job and the friends are unaware of what has taken place in the heavens, but we are able to read about these conversations between God and Satan that set the stage for the rest of the book. Satan desires to see and

² John Piper, "Job: Wrestling with Suffering," sermon 14 July 1985, available at www.desiringgod.org

predicts that Job will curse God to his face if he is made to suffer. And God allows Satan to afflict Job, but with clear limits. God is clearly in control. And even though the men involved in these conversations did not know about this, they understood this fundamental truth about God: He is a sovereign God. He is not limited, by Satan, or by our free will, or by anything. God is sovereign over Satan, sovereign over our free will, sovereign over suffering and evil.

Last week we gleaned some important insights that are found in the second round of speeches. We saw the true point that Eliphaz makes about human depravity. We observed some of the similarities between Job's suffering and Christ's suffering, and also how this suffering will be experienced by all who follow Christ. And then finally we looked at the glorious words of hope that Job proclaims in chapter 19, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." This week, in this section of chapters that conclude the conversations with the friends and contain Job's final speeches before Elihu takes center stage, I want to focus on what Job says about wisdom in chapter 28. This is a kind of interlude between his final response to the friends in chapters 26-27, and then his final defense of his own integrity which he makes in chapters 29-31. The tone of chapter 28 is very different. It sounds very much like the Proverbs. And the purpose of this discourse is to make the point that God's wisdom is beyond us. We know that He is in control and that He has a good purpose for everything He does, but His ways are above our ways, and His thoughts are above our thoughts (see Isaiah 55:9). We can't get our finite minds around His infinite plans.

So let's look at this wisdom chapter here in the middle of Job, and we'll look at it in three segments.

Searching for Riches (verses 1-11)

In these verses Job describes man's search for precious metals, and he does so in order to illustrate the search for wisdom.

"Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold that they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. Man puts an end to darkness and searches out to the farthest limit the ore in gloom and deep darkness. 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. As for the earth, out of it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire. Its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold. "That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon's eye has not seen it. The proud beasts have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it. "Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots. He cuts out channels in

the rocks, and his eye sees every precious thing. He dams up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.” (Job 28:1-11)

These words highlight man’s ingenuity in pursuing riches, in pursuing the precious metals and precious stones contained in the earth. There are mines and methods for refining. There is the ability to plunge into deep darkness and discover sapphires and gold. Job points out that animals do not have the ability to do this. Verses 7-8, “That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon’s eye has not seen it. The proud beasts have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it.” But mankind is uniquely gifted, uniquely created in God’s image, such that we have the ability to do these amazing feats. Verse 9, “Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots.” It is remarkable what can be done in the pursuit of riches. The creativity that is involved, and the passion, and the continual effort, and extreme risk. Think about the miners described in verse 4 who hang in the air, swinging to and fro in a deep shaft. We are willing to take great risks, and expend much energy to obtain riches, and the results are truly astounding. As the end of verse 11 says, “the thing that is hidden he brings out to light.”

Wisdom is not yet mentioned in these first 11 verses, but we can already begin to see the point that Job intends to get across. As talented as we may be in uncovering precious metals from the earth, we are unable to obtain that which is far more precious: wisdom and understanding.

The Value of Wisdom (verses 12-19)

“But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’ and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’ It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.” (Job 28:12-19)

Verse 12 is the main question of the chapter, “where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” This question will be repeated in verse 20. The first answer, in verses 12-19, is a negative one. Wisdom is *not* found in the land of the living (verse 13). We can’t get wisdom the same way we get precious metals from the earth. Neither can we buy wisdom with gold or silver or jewels. Wisdom is worth far more than these, and it comes from another source. It’s not an earthly commodity.

As Job wrestles with his desperate situation, and tries to reconcile what he knows about God with what he knows about himself, he appeals to the fact that there is a wisdom that is far beyond us, and beyond our comprehension. There is a wisdom that is greater in worth than silver or gold, and it is beyond the intelligence of mankind to find it.

One point that we can obviously derive from this is the importance of seeking for wisdom rather than riches. Verses 1-11 described the passion and commitment and risk that are involved in pursuing silver and gold. An even greater passion and commitment and risk should characterize our pursuit of godly wisdom. Proverbs 4:7 says, “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.” Then Proverbs 4:13, “Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.” And in Proverbs 8:34-36 wisdom is personified, and beckons us, “Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.” We should each consider what it is we are really pursuing in life. Are we spending all of our time and energy and creativity and ingenuity in the pursuit of riches? Are we passionately seeking for silver and gold and jewels? Are we digging holes in the earth trying to get things that have value only in this world? Or are we striving for that which is far more precious? Are we committing our lives to the pursuit of godly wisdom?

This passage should remind us again that our lives must revolve around the things that really matter, the things that are eternal, the things that are truly valuable. Let’s not be seduced by the desire for riches. Let’s not be enticed by material things. This reminds me of Peter’s statement about true beauty in 1 Peter 3. It is a statement to wives, but it can apply to all of us in various ways. He says, “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” For each of us, I pray that our lives will not revolve around externals, but that we will focus on cultivating godly wisdom in our lives, which in God’s sight is very precious—far more valuable than the biggest diamond, more to be desired than any amount of silver or gold. Don’t waste your life on the things this world call precious, no matter how much they may sparkle or shine.

Wisdom from God (verses 20-28)

Verse 20 repeats the question of verse 12, and then the following verses explain that wisdom can only be found in God.

“From where, then, does wisdom come? 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.’ “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and 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. And he said to man, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’” (Job 28:20-28)

Job’s hope and trust is in God’s wisdom, which is “hidden from the eyes of all living” (v. 20). This is why the friends are attacking him and misreading the situation. And this is why Job cannot understand the purpose of what is happening to him. It’s because God has His ways which are hidden from us. We often will not know why certain things happen. We will ask our questions, but clear answers will elude us.

Our hope, then, is verse 23: “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.” Even though wisdom is hidden from us, it is not hidden from God. He is all-knowing. He is all-wise. Verse 24 tells us that He is also all-seeing. “For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.” In addition to this, God is also the all-powerful Creator of all things. Verses 25-27, “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.” This is the comfort that we can find in the midst of trials. When we cannot fathom why we would be going through a particular trial, we can look in faith to the God who knows all things, and knows exactly how this trial fits into His overarching plan to glorify His Name and work for the good of His people.

Spurgeon said, “When we cannot trace God’s hand, we must simply trust His heart.” This is the call of this passage. When we cannot figure out what God is doing, we must simply trust His heart. When we don’t understand the purpose of our suffering, we have to believe that our God is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, and all-wise. God is both wise and omnipotent (all-powerful), which means that his plans are good and righteous, *and* that He will always carry out His good plans without being hindered in any way. J. I. Packer writes in his classic book *Knowing God*, “Wisdom without power would be

pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes him utterly worthy of our fullest trust.”³

What trial are you going through right now? Certainly there are things that you just don’t understand. Maybe there are certain pieces that we *do* understand, and we can already see God’s sanctifying purposes in our suffering. But surely there are other aspects of our hardships that we cannot comprehend. And we may be tempted to be angry with God. But instead we need to realize that God knows what He’s doing. He didn’t make a mistake. And it’s definitely not the case that this situation escaped His control. He is all-wise *and* all-powerful.

The last verse of the chapter gives a clear definition of what wisdom will look like in our lives, “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” Very similar statements are found in Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7; 9:10, and in Ecclesiastes 12:13. Interestingly, this description matches the way God described Job in chapters 1-2. He was one who feared God and turned away from evil. Godly wisdom involves fear of God. We stand in reverence and awe before His glory and His majesty. We tremble at the thought of being His enemy. We want to be near Him and to walk closely with Him and to obey His commands, thus turning away from evil. This is the wisdom we pursue in our walk with the Lord. And as we do this we will have greater glimpses of God’s wisdom, even though we will never fully comprehend His plans.

Jesus Christ: the Wisdom of God

Finally, I want us to see that God has revealed His wisdom to us in a profound and personal way in the Person of Jesus Christ. Job says in verse 21 that wisdom is hidden from the eyes of all living. But God has now revealed His wisdom by sending His own Son to earth. Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, who is very-God of very-God, came and lived among us and made known to us God’s nature. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Paul there calls Jesus Christ the wisdom of God. To those who are called, to those who have eyes to see, Jesus Christ is the revelation of God’s wisdom. In verse 30 of that chapter Paul also writes, “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God . . .”

To those who are unregenerate, Christ and His cross seem utterly foolish. To suffer and die such a tortuous death with the intention of saving others is the height of folly in the eyes of the

³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), pg. 91.

world. But this is the infinite wisdom of God. He ordained this tragedy—the most horrific tragedy of all time—for a good and glorious purpose, the salvation of all those who repent of their sin and put their trust in Jesus. Although it seemed foolish to many, and still seems foolish to many, it was the wise and gracious and omnipotent plan of God that orchestrated every detail. His death means life for us. His punishment means forgiveness for us. The wrath of God coming down on Him means for us peace with God. This is the Good News of Jesus Christ for all who will bow the knee in humble submission and dependence upon Him.

And as we think about the trials of life, and the wisdom of God, we are reminded in such a powerful way by the cross of Christ, that God's wisdom is truly wise, even when we don't understand. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross should be such a motivation to us to trust that even when it seems like the world is crashing down on us, even in our darkest despair, God has a plan. Every hardship we face is part of God's wise purposes. It was true of Christ's suffering, and it is true of our suffering. So we stand in awe of His wisdom and submit to His will, and we say with Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36)