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Why Be Good? | The Book of Jōb

“Where Can We Find Wisdom? (Cycle 3)”

Job 28

5.19.24

"Surely there is a mine for silver And a place where they refine gold. 2 "Iron is taken from the dust, And copper is smelted from rock. 3 "Man puts an end to darkness, And to the farthest limit he searches out The rock in gloom and deep shadow. 4 "He sinks a shaft far from habitation, Forgotten by the foot; They hang and swing to and fro far from men. 5 "The earth, from it comes food, And underneath it is turned up as fire. 6 "Its rocks are the source of sapphires, And its dust contains gold. 7 "The path no bird of prey knows, Nor has the falcon's eye caught sight of it. 8 "The proud beasts have not trodden it, Nor has the fierce lion passed over it. 9 "He puts his hand on the flint; He overturns the mountains at the base. 10 "He hews out channels through the rocks, And his eye sees anything precious. 11 "He dams up the streams from flowing, And what is hidden he brings out to the light. 12 "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? 13 "Man does not know its value, Nor is it 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.' 15 "Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price. 16 "It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, In precious onyx, or sapphire. 17 "Gold or glass cannot equal it, Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold. 18 "Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned; And the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls. 19 "The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, Nor can it be valued in pure gold. 20 "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? 21 "Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living And concealed from the birds of the sky. 22 "Abaddon and Death say, 'With our ears we have heard a report of it.' 23 "God understands its way, And He knows its place. 24 "For He looks to the ends of the earth And sees everything under the heavens. 25 "When He imparted weight to the wind And meted out the waters by measure, 26 When He set a limit for the rain And a course for the thunderbolt, 27 Then He saw it and declared it; He established it and also searched it out. 28 "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

We've been looking at The Book of Jōb, and where many people know the book for its beginning and ending, we've given attention to the neglected MIDDLE of the book that consists of this long poetic conversation.

Lots of people know the riveting set-up because it's a trope or theme or motif in Western Literature: an apparently good person suffers unjustly and learns from it. So, in the Book of Job, a good man is mentioned by God at a kind of "heavenly cabinet meeting". An accuser, a fallen angel, "the satan" says, "This man serves God only because God pays so WELL... Take away the benefits and Job will leave God and not look back!"

And God allows it; the satan takes Job's vast assets, his employees, his TEN children die when a whirlwind flattens the house where his adult children are celebrating a birthday party... And finally, Job himself is struck by an awful, burning skin disease (like shingles) head to toe.

But we've focused on the PAIN of social alienation as Job's friends (who look a lot like rivals) are blaming him for his own misery. "God blesses good people and curses bad people – YOU, Job, are evidently cursed, therefore you must be bad... So, tell us what you did to deserve this!"

There are THREE rounds of this – each rival friend speaks and then Job replies THREE times... A LOT of words and at this point, there's an incursion, a hymn about wisdom. Job may be starting to "get it" though he'll waver in the coming section... He's saying, "Only God knows what's happening. I don't and you guys sure don't and I'm not sure we're ever going to find out WHY...we need wisdom!"

Today, we'll look at WISDOM in this wisdom book for adults and see what is the big deal about wisdom? Why should we want it... where do we get it...what do we do with it? Let's look at:

1. The Struggle for Wisdom
2. The Song and Source of Wisdom
3. The Secret, the Seeing, the Service of Wisdom

I love that saying, "The Struggle is Real!" and it really IS when it comes to getting wisdom. Job points out the one human technology that most astounded him in the ancient world and that was mining and metallurgy. He was blown away by the lengths to which humans would go to get metal out of the earth. "To boldly go where no man had gone before!" Retrieving gold, copper, iron, gems from the depths...where no animal had ever gone.

Nothing can see like the falcon, but even the falcon can't see under the earth like human miners can. The lion excels all other beasts for courage... but even lions aren't brave enough to hang by ropes and descend into the dark deep.

And WE might be blown away by whatever the human technology that's most impressive in OUR day... Artificial Intelligence or communications or space-travel. And... you know... there are some big breakthroughs right around the corner. We're taming the planet. BUT we still haven't become wise...can't stop wars, pollution, crime, traffic.

We can't see behind the veil. Educated people are driven to consult "psychics". Martha Stewart had to have insider trading information. We can't master ourselves and our motives and so many are unsure why we're here, what is our purpose? Today, scientists are exploring mining in outer space... but WHY? Is it simply survival of the fittest and propagation of the species? Why are we here? What's the purpose of life?

If wisdom can be partially defined as the right use of knowledge...are we? Aren't we both fascinated AND afraid of the new technologies? Nuclear energy can power our cities OR destroy our cities... What about Artificial Intelligence and genetic engineering...will we use that knowledge rightly or wrongly? We have

no shortage of data but will we use them wisely?... If history is the indicator... no wonder we're facing an anxiety epidemic.

Then Job comes out and asks the question he's been illustrating (v. 12): "But where will wisdom be found?" Don't we know how valuable it is? He's speaking like a king here – like a philosopher king – like Solomon! He's musing on the ultimate questions still plaguing humanity and he's proposing that knowledge and facts and science and information are so wonderful but without the wisdom to know HOW to use this information and without the wisdom of knowing the "end-game" the TELOS, the reason, the purpose, the goal... we're just the highest animal.

It's why this middle paragraph is laser-focused on HOW exceedingly valuable wisdom is... We all want more gold; we're convinced that if we made a little more money, life would be so much better... but wisdom is better than money. You can buy knowledge but you can't BUY wisdom. The greatest, rarest treasures from all over the world (gold, coral, Topaz from Ethiopia) won't get you wisdom. But our second point is the Song and Source of Wisdom. We shouldn't miss that this is a SONG about wisdom. It's poetry and it reminds us that wisdom is perhaps more in the scope of the artist, the poet, than it is the realm of the scientist. Perhaps wisdom is more an art than a science. This hymn of wisdom may be the first sign that Job is rounding-the-corner... and it's a song full of vivid imagery and metaphors and symbols and beauty.

And IN the song, when Job finally (last stanza) finally gets to the source of wisdom, surprisingly, he mentions (v. 22), "Abaddon and Death". Abaddon is the place/angel of destruction and Death is sort of personified – not in the land of the living but in death, in the world beyond, it is known that wisdom does exist. Death is somehow a doorway or portal to wisdom because it's used by God to focus our attention and clarify our thinking.

The grandmother in Flannery O'Connor's story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" – when she's faced with death, suddenly her silliness and her self-important pretensions all evaporate when her life is threatened and when she dies, the villain, the Misfit summarizes her life in the words, "She would have been a good woman", The Misfit said, "if it had been someone there to shoot her every minute of her life." She was never wiser than when facing death.

And God uses Death – not as the source of wisdom but as an arena where He (who IS the Source) brings wisdom to light like gold from a deep mine. He used the thought of Isaac's death to seal Abraham's faith and make him wise. He will use death and resurrection of Israel going down into Egypt and then reborn in the Exodus and the Exiles to Assyria and Babylon to give Israel "the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith" (2 Tim. 3.15). 'Same with Jonah.

And ultimately, God will use Abaddon (the Destroyer) and Death to bring Wisdom to light in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, the Apostle Paul writes to the Church at Corinth: "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1.23-24)

And again, in the next chapter of that same letter: "we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; wisdom which none of the rulers of this

age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory..." (1 Cor. 2.7-8)

God brings wisdom to light through death... on a macro, grand scale as in Israel's Exile and restoration AND on an ultimate scale through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and even on a micro, personal scale as He brings death into our lives... He's making the death of Job bring wisdom to light for his foolish friends who have joined the team of the accuser and are tools of the satan.

Job is, in a sense, dying for the sins of his friends. Out of his destruction, the death of his children and his old life – THEY and WE are being presented with True Wisdom.

Job's life is becoming "Cruciform". Do you know that word? It means shaped like a Cross... some church buildings and great cathedrals are built in cruciform design and Job's life is becoming cruciform in that out of his suffering, destruction and death, his friends are meeting Wisdom.

And that brings us to the third point the Secret, the Seeing, the Service of Wisdom.

The secret of wisdom is in that great Kingdom Paradox i.e., out of death comes life. Jesus Christ said, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Lk. 9.24-25)

The wisdom of the world says, "Get! Get! Get!" It's all about YOU and it all depends on YOU! "He who dies with the most toys wins." (But of course: he who dies with the most toys still dies!).

The wisdom of God is a great paradox: "As I brought LIFE out of the death of My Beloved Son – so I will bring life out of YOUR dying in His name. As you give yourself away in the Name of Jesus Christ, I will make YOUR life cruciform and people around you will see the wisdom of God and become wise to salvation.

St. Paul saw this so clearly and embraced it so fully that he was able to say, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". (Col. 1.24)

Everything IN the Gospel-Centered Life cries out, "Uh, Paul, there's NOTHING lacking in Christ's afflictions! He suffered to the fullest and said in His dying breath, 'It is finished – paid in full! No more to do! It's DONE!'"

And Paul would say, "The only thing that remains is for this life-giving wisdom of God in Christ, is for it to be taken to the world and THAT'S where WE CHRISTIANS COME IN! Our dying to ourselves in Jesus Christ's name sends the fragrance of Life into the world, a fragrance of Christ": "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." (2 Cor. 2.14-16)

And this secret, this Kingdom Paradox that in losing our lives we actually find them... that out of my dying to my control issues and my god-complex and my having to DO IT – it's all about ME and it all DEPENDS on ME... as I die to that, God brings a fragrant reminder of Jesus Christ into the world...

Real wisdom, as the final verse makes clear, is "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'" (28) And you might be thinking, "Uh, man! This sermon is a bummer – I have to die to my desires and dreams... and I have to fear God!"

"And T.J. how does this fit with what St John wrote, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us." (1 Jn. 4.18-19)

Well, John is saying that we traded in the old cowering, terror of guilt and of wishing and hoping and begging that we're doing enough so that God won't punish me... and instead we have that sense of standing in front of an ocean or the Grand Canyon knowing, "This is power and this is NOT something to take lightly – God is Creator of All Things."

And THIS kind of fear...is not a slavish fear but a deeply loving respect of a lost and broken child being carried away from danger in the savagely strong arms of his Papa. And that's why you'll find this refrain in the Psalms: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness..." (Ps. 33.18)

God's lovingkindness, i.e., "HESED" in Hebrew, is His loyalty to the agreement or covenant He made with us and that Jesus Christ fulfilled. Those who truly fear God are those who depend on God's loyalty to His own grace.

Because we wait for His lovingkindness, we fear Him, we stand in awe of that kind of love that took guilty wastrels and turns us into children seated at His table and He foots the whole bill! It's a love that's fearsome... AND it makes me want to trust Him and turn away from evil.

I begin to see life this way... I'm not so much asking, "Hmmm... what would Jesus do?" but instead, "Because of the wisdom of God, the doing and dying of Jesus and the fearsome love that found me out... how can I serve this person? How can I humble myself as God did for me in Jesus Christ? How can I join Him in His great mission?"

Because of the secret of wisdom – that God brings life out of death – I'm seeing that I'm forgiven by God, accepted and even ADOPTED...and secure because of Jesus.

I'm seeing the world that way – the Good News becomes for me a lens through which I see all of life. It's a new way of seeing – "The Seeing Eye" (C.S. Lewis)

And I don't have to fear that if I inconvenience myself for someone in need that I'm losing my precious "me-time" because I see Him who loved ME and I trust that in losing my life with Him... I'm actually finding life. This is the wisdom of God.

## Q U O T E S

Looking for God — or Heaven — by exploring space is like reading or seeing all Shakespeare's plays in the hope you will find Shakespeare as one of the characters or Stratford as one of the places. Shakespeare is in one sense present at every moment in every play. But he is never present in the same way as Falstaff or Lady Macbeth, nor is he diffused through the play like a gas.

If there were an idiot who thought plays exist on their own, without an author, our belief in Shakespeare would not be much affected by his saying, quite truly, that he had studied all the plays and never found Shakespeare in them...

To some, God is discoverable everywhere; to others, nowhere. Those who do not find him on earth are unlikely to find him in space. (Hang it all, we're in space already; every year we go a huge circular tour in space.) But send up a saint in a spaceship and he'll find God in space as he found God on earth. Much depends on the seeing eye.

– C.S. Lewis, "The Seeing Eye" (originally titled, "Onward, Christian Spacemen"); an essay in Show Magazine February 1963 responding to the (erroneous) report that a Soviet Cosmonaut claimed to find no evidence of God in space (emphasis added)

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. (Jas. 1:5-10)