

Making Sense of it All

Job 28

Intro: Last week, at this time, the town of Midland was the way it has always been, a gentle Midwestern town with some nearby lakes and the meandering Tittabawassee River. And then a great rainstorm came, and dams collapsed, lakes vanished, and the town of Midland is now a disaster area.

Job's life was like that. He was living his normal life, surrounded by his loving family and enjoying God's good gifts, and then it seemed as if the dam broke and all the wrath of God and powers of hell were unleashed, and his life was swept away. All that was left was the ash-heap on which he sat, scraping his sores, and asking "why?"

Maybe you've experienced something like that in your life. The order of your life was overturned by some tragedy, some great loss, or great betrayal, or deadly disease. Or maybe you are just overwhelmed by the difficulty of normal life in a fallen world - where there is brokenness, loss, sin and failure and pain. Nothing in your life seems to work as it should - and you wonder "why?" Why does it have to be this way? Why does God allow these things? How can we make sense of all this?

Making sense of things is very important to us - and will radically effect how we respond to trials. For example: if the Governors orders seem reasonable to you, you will much more readily embrace them. But if they seem unreasonable, if you can't make sense of them, you will find this to be an incredibly frustrating time. You may even become bitter or angry. Whichever side of that line you fall - the same truth holds for all of us: We all find it a lot easier to submit and obey orders when they make sense to us. We are rational, reasonable people and all we ask is that our governing authorities make rational and reasonable demands of us. It doesn't seem like a big ask.

But God doesn't work that way. If you need to understand God's reasons before you can be at peace; if you need to know "why" before you can be content - you are going to be severely frustrated and disappointed in your Christian life. God will do things in your life and my life that don't make any sense to us. And He will not give you the reasons. He will just call you to trust Him and obey. And for that - you need wisdom.

I. The Meaning of Wisdom

Job 28 is a unique chapter in the book. It functions in the book like an intermission – a helpful pause for reflection after the turmoil and drama of the conversations between Job and his three friends. Its tone and pace is quiet and reflective.

The chapter is structured around a reoccurring question: “Where is wisdom to be found?” (vs 12,20). It’s one of the most fundamental questions of life. What is the point of life? What’s it all about? What is the foundational organizing principle or over-arching meta-narrative that would allow us to make sense of all that we see and experience? What is the answer to the question “Why”?

The Hebrew word for wisdom is “hokma” and its essential meaning is “skill”. The word is used in Exodus to describe the skill of the various craftsmen who created the beautiful tapestries and pieces of furniture for the tabernacle. Their ‘wisdom’ involved a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic ability that resulted a beautiful works of art. Wisdom is a high degree of knowledge and understanding and skill that results in something of beauty and value and worth.

One of the reasons we love great art, great music or even great sportsmanship is because we can’t help but admire the ability some people have to create beauty. I have to confess that when I see a great painting, or hear a great piece of music, I not only enjoy the art, but I envy the artist. Don’t you? Wouldn’t it be great to be able to paint like that, or sing like that, or play like that? Can you imagine what it would be like to be able to sing just one song like Pavarotti? Just one song that was incredible, awe-inspiring, perfect?

The Last Dance – the story of Michael Jordan. He was idolized around the world because he could do things on a basketball court that no one had ever seen before. He was the Beethoven of basketball. A craftsman of unapparelled skill.

But how do you create a beautiful life? How do take all the various threads of your life – your gender, your age, your personality, your natural gifts and unique deficiencies, your opportunities and your pain – how do you weave all of that together to make a masterpiece? How do you create a life of deep value and lasting worth?

Isn’t that what we secretly want? Don’t you want to be great? Don’t you want your life to be a something beautiful and worthy of honor? Of course, you do. Why do little girls want to be seen as pretty and little boys want to be seen as fast and strong? They want to be great! They want their lives to matter, to be worthy. Our native land is the Garden

of Eden and we sense that beauty and value and worth are somehow wrapped into our purpose and we long for it with a silent yearning. But how do you do that?

The world offers all sorts of suggestions.

- Be great! Michael Jordan lived that slogan! That's what drove him. He was great at putting an orange ball through a red rim. He was great at winning.
- Be yourself. Dennis Rodman approach. The post-modern idol of self-expression.

But neither approach is able to craft a weighty, honor-worthy life. Hence the question: Where can wisdom be found? Where can you find the skill to weave the one life you have to live into something approved by God and worthy for display in his heavenly tabernacle?

II. The Analogy of Mining

In verse 1-11 Job begins by talking about mining. There is a place for silver and gold and iron and copper. But it's a hidden place.

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...*

A mine is a hidden world; just like wisdom is a hidden world.

But people eagerly go there because there are treasures there.

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

And so, in a hungry search for riches....

⁹ *"Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots.*

People will go to great effort and great lengths to dig out from the rocks the treasures that they seek. And their efforts are rewarded with the treasures they find.

:12 "But where shall wisdom be found?" That's the million-dollar question. Where can you go to find the skill for godliness, and inner beauty and moral strength? Where can you learn how to make your life a masterpiece worthy of honor and glory and God?

And where is the place of understanding?" Where do you go to learn how to make sense of the world in all its chaos and evil? Where is the over-arching meta-narrative that makes sense of all this?

This is a key part of Job's struggle: his life has been utterly upended and eviscerated by God and it doesn't make sense! Where can he go to discern the ways of God, where can he go to find answers for his question, "why"?

If gaining wisdom were simply a matter of digging it up from the rocks, like a miner digging gold, if we could find it by human ingenuity and skill – that would be great. But wisdom isn't like that. It can't be found that way. There are great and insurmountable obstacles to finding wisdom.

III. The Obstacles to Wisdom

A. *Wisdom isn't Valued* – :13 *"Man does not know its worth."*

People will eagerly look for pleasure, they will diligently work to gain a desired skill, they will persistently pursue a desired relationship, they will hunt for money and labor for fame. These are things people value and they pursue the things they value with great persistence and initiative. But people don't understand the value of wisdom. They don't know its worth. The evidence is in the little time or thought they give to pursuing it.

But even if people *did* know its value, they couldn't afford it.

B. *Wisdom is Unaffordable*

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.

But even if you could afford it – where would you find it?? That's the fundamental question of the text. Where can you find the thing that makes sense of life? Where can you find the answers to all the heart-breaking questions? Where can you find the skill to craft a beautiful life? Where is wisdom to be found?

C. *Wisdom Can't be Found on Earth*

¹³ *"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.'

²² Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.'

Abaddon is another word for Sheol, the place of the dead, and they speak. After all the life they've lived, after all the loves and labors, all the experiences, the friendships and families, after all the hopes and joys and even all the sorrows allotted to men – the best they can say is *"We have heard a rumor of it with our ears."* A full life under the sun cannot provide wisdom, it can only pass along the rumor of it.

We've all heard the rumor of what we were made for. We've tasted longings that this world can't satisfy.

C.S. Lewis, "Most people know that they do want, and want acutely something that cannot be had in this world....The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy." (Ash, 289)

We've all heard the rumor, we've sensed there is something that could deeply and truly satisfy, something that would make us beautiful and whole. But the wisdom that would allow us to gain it can't be found in this world. Everything is vanity under the sun.

But there is good news, great news! Wisdom is not lost! **God knows the way to it.**

IV. Where Wisdom can be Found

A. God Knows the Way to It

²³ "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place."

The answer to all our questions and the secret to a life of beauty and worth does exist, but you have to look up to find it. Wisdom dwells with God. So, what do we need to do??

B. God tells us how to Find it.

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

This might seem anti-climatic to you. If you are suffering some deep heartache, some devastating hardship, this might seem unhelpful – but I urge you to pay attention.

Ash, "How we respond to this verse is a litmus test for our hearts."

What does it mean to fear the Lord? I like the definition given by Sinclair Ferguson.

"The fear of God is really another way of saying 'knowing God'. It is a heartfelt love for him because of who he is and what he has done; a sense of being in his majestic presence. It is a thrilling awareness that we have this greatest of all privileges, mingled with a realization that now the only thing that really matters is His opinion."

"To turn away from evil is understanding" – it's what you do when you know and love the glory of God!

But let's apply this to the story of Job, and the story of those who suffer. **Tim Keller** asks the question: "What does the fear of the Lord mean in the presence of suffering?"

"It means scary-level unconditional trust in the love of God in the midst of the darkness. The fear of the Lord is scary-level unconditional trust that God is loving you even though it doesn't feel that way, that God is loving you even though everything around you seems dark. It's trusting God in the dark, trusting his love in the dark.

I heard a man tell the story of a young woman who had some of her friends over to her house for an afternoon. Her husband was in the military, serving in Vietnam. As she was chatting and enjoying the company of her friends, a knock came on the front door and the message was delivered that her beloved husband had been killed in action. She covered her face and ran to her bedroom, closing the doors. Her friends went to her door, seeking to comfort her, but stopped when they hear her talking. She was saying, over and over, "Oh, My Father. Oh, My Father. Oh, my Father."

That's the fear of the Lord. In her darkest moment, she turned to her Loving Heavenly Father and cast herself upon Him, trusting the Lord in the dark.

This is the profound truth of this verse – wisdom isn't found in an answer that will make sense of our life, but in a Person, God Himself as the Savior and Lord of our life.

Ash, "God does not take us by the hand and lead us to the answers; rather he beckons us to bow before the Lord Himself, who knows the answers, but chooses not to tell us." (284)

What are you looking for from God? Many self-professed Christians are actually looking for the key that will make their life in this world "work", the key that will give them the good life. And to those people "fearing the Lord and turning from evil" means, be respectful of God and keep your nose clean. Go to church, live a good Christian life and God will bless you with a good, more-or-less pain-free life. It's a deal they make with God. They do their part, and they expect God to do His.

I think we very commonly feel this way. And the evidence is seen in how we respond to loss and tragedy. To the degree your Christian life has been about making this deal with God is the degree of bitterness you will feel when God causes you to suffer. You will have no comfort from God, in fact, you will feel betrayed by Him.

Fearing God and shunning evil is not the path to the good life. Remember, Job was the poster boy for fearing God and turning from evil. And yet he still ended up scraping his decaying flesh on the ash heap of a devastated life. But I assure you of this: when you talk to Job in heaven, he will tell you that his suffering, as painful and incomprehensible as it was, was good for him. Why? Because it deepened his knowledge of God. "I had heard of you with my ears, but now my eyes have seen you." Job never got answers to his questions – he got something better, the knowledge of God.

The wisdom that makes sense of and brings beauty to our life is not found in knowing the answers, but in knowing the Author. And the glorious gospel message is that God has come to earth so that we can.

In **1 Corinthians 1:30** Paul writes,

"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God"

In **Colossians 2:3** Paul speaks of Christ,

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Wisdom has a name – Jesus. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

In Jesus we find irrefutable reasons to trust God in the dark. If God loved us so much when we were rebels to his cause, how much can we trust Him now that we are His own, blood-bought children?

Jesus redeemed you with His blood and has given you His Holy Spirit to do this one thing – make you into a display of the splendor and glory of God. Your life, right now, might look like a tangled web of threads, no rhyme or reason to any of it. But this is just the back-side of the tapestry Jesus is weaving. Every thread, every pain, every trial is perfectly placed by the wisdom of Christ Jesus. He is the skilled artist weaving something glorious and beautiful and worthy with the threads of your life for the glory of God. And one day, he's going to turn it around and show you the masterpiece, the person he was making you to be – the new you, created in the image of Christ.

This is the gospel promise: "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."