

Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn to our Bible reading. Phil Coupland, one of our ministers, is picking up again his series in Jub.

And we're going to read together this evening from Jub chapter 28. We're going to read the whole chapter, Jub 28. This is a reflective chapter.

And it pulls together something of what we've already been seeing throughout the book of Jub. So beginning Jub chapter 28 verse 1. 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.

[1 : 11] They swing to and through. 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 damns up the streams so that they do not trickle. And the thing that is hidden he brings out to light. 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.

[2 : 15] 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. 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.

[3 : 21] 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. Amen. This is God's word. And we will return to it shortly.

Well good evening. And please do have your Bibles open. To Job chapter 28. And we will come to that eventually. Is anyone else warm this evening?

I am very warm. I have to tell you. So hopefully we make it through this. But there we go. Well it's been a few months. Since we've been in this book together. This wisdom book. And so I thought it would be helpful.

[4 : 22] If we just spent a bit of time. Having a quick recap. Back at the very beginning. We were introduced to Job. And what a man. We are told that he is the greatest man.

In fact. Of the east. A man of integrity. In his dealings with other people. Seriously wealthy. He had a whole load of servants. Thousands of animals.

He was very very wealthy. He had a loving family. Ten grown up children. Who all seemed to love each other. And get on really well. And most importantly.

We are told that Job was a real believer. That is he is a man who feared God. And turned away from evil. In other words. Job walked by repentance and faith.

And the thing that Job cares about the most. If you read the start of the book. You will see. It is being right with God. That is what Job cares about the most. But in chapters 1 and 2.

[5 : 19] Job is suddenly hit by wave upon wave. Of the most horrendous suffering. And he loses everything. His animals are stolen. His livelihood is stripped from him.

His servants are killed. And most heartbreaking of all. His ten precious children. Are all killed. And Job's health. Also deteriorates.

He is struck by the most appalling skin condition. Imaginable. Painful sores break out all over his body. And he is forced to go out of the city.

And to go and sit down in a rubbish dump. On the ash heap. Where they burnt up the garbage. And his only comfort was to scrape his sores. With a piece of broken pottery. The man who was once the greatest man of the east.

Is reduced to nothing like that. Now as the readers of the book. We know something about all of that. That Job doesn't. For in chapters 1 and 2.

[6 : 19] It is revealed to us. The readers. That all this terrible suffering. Has come about. Because. The Lord God. Sovereignly. And shockingly. Gave Satan permission.

To sift Job like wheat. You see Satan had made an accusation. To the Lord. In the heavenly realms. He said. I have been all over this earth. And I cannot find.

A genuine believer. Anywhere. I have been up and down this earth. And there is no one who loves you. Simply because you are God. And the Lord responds. And says. Have you considered my servant Job?

And Satan replied. Job come on. You are talking about Job? No. Job only loves you. Because you have given him lots of good stuff. That is why he loves you. But if you are to stretch out your hand against him.

Take away all of the good stuff. He will curse you. To your face. And the Lord replied to Satan. Go on then. He is in your hand.

[7 : 17] Hit Job. With suffering and loss. Only spare his life. And you will see. That Job proves to be a real believer. Someone who loves me.

Simply because I am God. And that is why the terrible suffering swept over Job. And how did he respond? Well remarkable. With remarkable faith.

He did exactly what the Lord said he would do. He showed himself to be a true believer. He did not once curse God. He did not turn away from the Lord. In the midst of his pain.

In the midst of his agony. Job trusted in the Lord. And continued to fear the Lord. And showed that he was a real believer. But as I said a minute ago.

Job knows nothing. He knows nothing about this conversation. That happened in the heavenly realms. Between the Lord and Satan. And on earth. In the aftermath of all of the pain. Job is utterly perplexed.

[8 : 11] Because of what has happened to him. He cannot understand. Why this has happened. And that is the agonized question. That he cries out in chapter 3. Twice. Why? Why?

Why? And when Job cried out that agonizing question. In chapter 3. Those of you who were here. You remember. That he was not alone. On the rubbish dump. When he cried out that question. He was also accompanied by three. So-called. Friends. And they said to Job. Well Job. We'll give you the answer. We are wise.

We'll tell you why. This has happened. It's obvious. You must be. An impenitent sinner. Who is guilty of carrying out some secret hidden sin.

And God is rightly punishing you for it Job. Job you know that's true. You must repent of this awful sin. Whatever it is you've done. You know. If you repent. The Lord will turn around and bless you.

[9 : 08] For the Lord does not cause his faithful. And blameless people. Real believers to suffer. So come on Job. Listen to our words of wisdom. Turn.

And you will be restored. And when Job hears that. He is having. None of it. Job is adamant. That he is not guilty of doing the things. That his three friends. Have accused him of doing. And from chapter 4. To chapter 27. What you get is. You read these frenetic debates. Between Job and his friends. They go back and forth. Constantly clashing against each other. In debate. It rages. And it rumbles on. And it gets more and more intense. More and more heated. And by the end of chapter 27. When the debates kind of frizzle out. No progress has been made. No one has been able to give a satisfactory answer. To Job's agonized question. [10:03] Why? In fact by the end of chapter 27. It seems that the three friends. Have run out of things to say. And Job is still painfully perplexed. And desperate.

For understanding. And you get that chapter. After chapter. After chapter. After chapter. Of fierce debate. And then you hit chapter 28. Chapter 28. Which is really the central point. Of the book. Of the book. In that chapter. Everything. Slows. Down. The volume. Gets turned down. Let me just say a few words of introduction. To the chapter. This chapter. Firstly. It is very different. From all that has gone before. And from all that follows.

It's a unique chapter in the book. There's no smooth literary connection. With the immediate context. Before and after. There's no accusations in this chapter. No complaints. No protests. [10:58] There's no responses to anything. Anyone has said previously. It is a reflective tone. Which is so different. From the passionate arguments. Either side of it. Chapter 29 to 31.

Job will make his final defense. Against his friend's accusation. And make a final plea. To the Lord for answers. Chapter 28. Is so different. It seems to stand alone.

One commentator says. That it is a tranquil. Contemplative pause. For thought. Or the great Bob File. Those of you who know me. Know I love to do a Bob File impression. But I shall not do an impression of him. I'll just tell you what he says. Shall I? He says. It's the kind of thing. That you find. In a Greek tragedy. And I've never. Seen a Greek tragedy. But if you know. What a Greek tragedy is. And you've seen one. Well Bob says. It's like the type of thing. You find in a Greek tragedy. Where there's a pause in the drama. And there's a big chorus. Of singers. Behind backstage. And they sing.

[11:54] This interval. In the drama. That is meant to make you. The audience. Reflect upon. What has happened. Make you think. About what you've witnessed. Happening. In the main drama.

And that seems to be. What is happening. In chapter. 28. It is there. To make us think. To make us reflect. Upon what we have read.

And also to prepare us. For what is to come. In the rest of the book. One last thing to say. By way of introduction. Before we look at the detail. Is it is not actually clear.

Who is speaking here. If you have an ESV. The ESV is adamant. That it is Job. Who is still speaking here. It might be. But because this chapter. Is so different. Most commentators. Assume. That the chapter. Has actually been placed here. By the author of the book. Although others. Just as I say. Assume that it's actually. Job's speech. Part of the speech. That he began. Back in chapter 27.

[12:50] Since there's no explicit. Mention of a change of speaker. In the text. It probably doesn't matter. The only reason I mention it. Is if you have read up. On this chapter. Before you come. I want you to realize.

That it doesn't really matter. Whatever. Whatever your take of it is. It is part of God's word. And it's a poem. That has been spoken. By the authority of God. And it contains.

A key lesson for us. A key truth. About where. Shall wisdom be found. Well with all that in mind. Let's look at this majestic poem.

Let's get into the detail. And it splits nicely. Into three sections. Firstly. In verses 1 to 11. We see a dangerous. And demanding search.

For a precious object. A dangerous. And demanding search. For a precious object. That's how this chapter begins. Somewhat randomly. Without any explanation. The poet invites us.

[13:45] To tour and marvel. At the wonders. Of human. Mining. Exploration. Please look at verse 1. 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. I wonder if you've ever been down. A mine. I once. A few years ago. Went down.

A tour of an old mine. A disused mine shaft. In England. It wasn't very deep. But it was still deep enough. To be quite scary. And very mysterious. And I got the sense. From being there. Even in this.

Small mine. That actually. Mining could be a very lonely. Difficult. Painstaking. And dangerous activity. But after we'd been in the mine. We also saw pictures. Of the types of things.

[14 : 39] That they found in the mine. The precious materials. And it made me see. That actually. Mining whilst hard. Actually. Helps us to find things.

Of great value. And that is what the poet. Wants you to picture. At the start of chapter 28. Picture the mine shaft. He says. It's like a dark world. Full of puzzles.

And hidden perplexities. Full of things. That we cannot find. And understand. And yet. Things that are of great value. And worth searching out. And he goes on to say.

If a man wants to find. These valuable objects. Down there in the mine. He has to go through. An incredibly demanding. And dangerous search. I think that's what verse 4. Is saying. The miner will need to go to places.

That are far away from everyone else. Plummet into isolation. The miner will also have to swing to. And throw from a rope. As he is lowered down. Deeper and deeper. Into the dark.

[15 : 35] Into the depths. And please look at verse 5. As for the earth. Out of it comes bread. But underneath. It is turned up. As by fire.

In other words. The poet is saying. That agriculture. Is relatively straightforward activity. Growing crops. Producing food from the earth. It's not hard. But the search for hidden treasure. Under the ground. Is immensely hard. And violent. It's difficult. And in verse 7 to 8. The poet says. That this search for precious objects.

Down in the mine. Is characteristic of humankind alone. Neither the falcon. With his matchless eyesight. Nor the lion. With his mighty strength.

Is engaged in this particular costly search. It's only human beings that do this. Because only human beings understand the true value. Of the search for precious objects.

[16 : 33] Now friends. Why? And this is the key question. Why on earth does the poet mention this? Why is this here? Well verse 12 gives us the answer.

Look at verse 12. But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? See in this poem about mining. We see a parallel between searching for something.

In the natural domain. And a greater. Deeper search. In the cosmic domain. The search. Not for precious stones. But the search for wisdom.

And friends. I take it at this point in the book. We're meant to draw lines. With what we've seen before. And we're to see that Job. What is he like? He is like a lonely.

Isolated miner. Who's desperately searching and searching. For something far greater than iron. Silver or gold. Job is searching for God's wisdom.

[17 : 33] He's searching for understanding from the Lord. He's searching for the answer to the question. Why? So far Job has been unable to find wisdom. And understanding that he's been looking for.

From his friends. All they've offered to him. Has been fool's gold. Useless. That is what this poem is doing here I take it.

It's meant to make us reflect upon what has come before. In all of these speeches from 4 to 27. And therefore it helps us feel deeply. The struggle and the agony that Job is going through.

The lonely miner. In the dark depths of the earth. Desperately searching for the most precious item ever. Wisdom. And his friends are no help at all.

Well let's just ask. What does verse 12 mean by the word wisdom? Well one commentator puts it like this. We might call this as wisdom with a capital W.

[18 : 33] In the imagery of the Old Testament. This wisdom means something like. The architecture of the universe. As Proverbs 3 verse 19 says. The Lord by wisdom.

Founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. So when God built the universe. Just like building a building. He did so according to a blueprint.

Called wisdom. Wisdom is the fundamental underlying order. According to which the whole universe was constructed. This is deeper than just an order.

In its material composition. This is also to do with the moral structure. And the spiritual dimensions of existence. And listen to Christopher Ashe on this point.

This is what he says. Just as the physical scientist pursues the project of science. And the belief that there is order to be discovered. So the believer. Lives on the earth.

[19 : 30] In the conviction. That it is finally not a chaotic universe. But one built upon a fundamental underlying and majestic order. And it is of course this conviction.

That is so sorely challenged. In the life. And the experience of Job. You see what he's saying? Job knows that there is this wisdom and structure.

That underlines all of existence in the universe. But because of the horrific suffering. That he's faced as a believer. However. It caused him to question that wisdom. And to wonder whether it exists.

Or even better. Whether God will reveal it to him. So that he can make sense. Of the painful things that he's been through. Sometimes we speak about the architect of a piece of hardware or software.

This is Christopher Ashe again. And by this we mean that the underlying structure. Such that if we understand it. We shall grasp why something behaves the way it behaves.

[20 : 29] And responds as it does. And in a similar way. The poet knows. That if only we can grasp the architecture. Or the structure of the universe. Then we shall know the answer to Job's question.

Why? And we shall know the answer. Not only for our own personal pain. But also for every person. And each event in history. Let me just say this friends.

I'll sum up this point like this. The book of Job. You might think. Is primarily about arguments. And philosophies and debates. It is not. What is the book of Job really all about?

It's about the search of a believer. Who is suffering. Looking for wisdom. Longing to understand. Why this world is the way that it is.

And more specifically. To understand the purpose. For which God allows his faithful people. To suffer. Well that's the first thing we see in this chapter.

[21 : 31] And in the second section. The poet moves to a meditation. On the most deeply frustrating tension. In Job's existence. Job simply must know the answer to this question.

Why? He must know the reason why God has allowed all this suffering to happen to him. But the trouble is. Job cannot find out this answer. And that brings us to the second heading this evening. In verse 12 to 22. We see. That wisdom is priceless. And unobtainable. At the same time. Wisdom is priceless. And unobtainable.

At the same time. Now I've probably said this to you quite a few times in sermons here. But I'm a man who loves a sandwich. Do you like a sandwich? I love a sandwich.

I had a sandwich this afternoon for my lunch. Alright. I made one for my brother-in-law. Sat over there. He'll tell you how good the sandwich was this afternoon. It was a steak sandwich. It was beautiful. But there we go.

[22 : 31] Here in this passage here. It's structured very much like a sandwich. There are two pieces of bread. And in between we've got a filling. 12. Verse 12 to 14.

Just look at that. That's the first bit of bread. And verse 20 to 22. Is the second bit of bread. And they are teaching us that wisdom is unobtainable. And yet in the middle.

From verse 15 to 19. In the filling. It teaches us that wisdom is so valuable. And worthwhile pursuing. More than anything else in this world.

Let's just look at this tasty sandwich. And we'll look at the filling first of all. Look at verse 15 to 19. In these verses the poet wants us to be in no doubt.

Of the priceless value of gaining a grasp. Of how this world fits together. How it works. What its foundational structure is. It is what Job wants to know.

[23 : 26] So that he can make sense of the suffering. He's been put through. So in verse 15 to 19. The poet what he does is he piles up. Images of the most precious things. That this world affords.

He says. If you were to gather them all together. They are nothing compared to the cost. And the value of wisdom. So pile up all the very best. Gold and silver.

Onyx and sapphire. Wonderful jewels. Coral. Crystal. Topaz. Get it all. All of the gems in the world. Get all of the riches in the world. The precious stones.

In a big pile. And still you would not have enough wealth. To buy this wisdom. wisdom. It's such powerful poetry. It should make us want to pursue wisdom.

Above everything else in this world. And yet. In the bits of bread around our filling. We are told. That no matter how hard you search for this wisdom. You will fail.

[24 : 21] Let's look at verse 13. For example. Wisdom. Where is it found? Answer. It's not found in the land of the living. No. You will not find this wisdom.

Verse 14. If you were to jump in a state of the art submarine. And venture down into the deep. The depths of the sea. And if you went to the deep. And asked the deep. Do you have wisdom? Is wisdom found here?

The deep would reply to you. No. It's not here bro. It's not here. And in verse 20 and 22. The poet. Dumps us back on the ash heap of frustration.

Back with Job. He says. This search. That seemed so passionately worth pursuing. In the middle of our sandwich. Where does it lead? Where does it end? Well it ends with lonely Job.

On his heap of rubbish. Screaming the question. Why? For no living creature. Can find this wisdom. It is inaccessible. And unobtainable.

[25 : 21] Verse 22. Even if you were to go to Abaddon. And Abaddon is a kind of poetic figure. It's an angelic figure. We find him in Revelation 9. Sometimes called the angel of the bottomless pit.

If you go to Abaddon. And if you were to go to death. And ask them. Do you know where wisdom is? Even these personified powers. They would look at you blankly. And say. We think we once heard someone mention something.

About it a long time ago. But we can't be sure. Just a rumor. You can't find it anywhere. so what is the poet doing here he's describing the agony and the tension that has taken place within job's heart i take it on the one hand job longs to know why his life has been struck by such atrocious suffering is he right to long to understand why well yes for to understand this would be to understand wisdom the radical structure of the universe and no greater goal can be possible for the human seeker but is his search dim for failure answer yes says the poet job must seek and yet he will never find wisdom and friends if the poem ended there it would leave us in utter despair maybe that's what you're thinking right now you're feeling an utter despair well the poem doesn't end there for verse 23 to 28 the poet gives us great hope and that brings me on to my third and final point this evening verse 23 to 28 we see a humbling answer to job's dilemma in verse 12 and 20 the poet asks the same question twice where shall wisdom be found and in verse 23 to 24 he almost answers himself but not quite just look at verse 23 and 24 god understands the way to it he knows its place for he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens now we aren't told of the location of wisdom but our eyes are directed instead to the one who knows that place for he has set it in place and therefore he alone understands the way and then a great anticipation of the lord's speeches at the end of the book what the poet does is he presses home his point by directing our wonder to one of the most uncontrollable and seemingly random things of the created order the weather please look at verse 25 when he as god 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 and established it and searched it out that is wisdom and just think about all of the technology that we have today that has been designed to help us make some sense of the weather there are supercomputers satellites weather sensors all sorts of technology that i'm i'm sure there's many more that i don't even know about and yet we so often struggle massively to make sense of the world's weather systems and the weather is wildly unpredictable and uncontrollable especially in glasgow if you don't like the weather in glasgow wait 10 minutes because it is usually changed to us the weather is unpredictable and uncontrollable but for god it is not random at all he is in complete control of it he is the one who made it and the one who runs it and says our poet when god ordered the weather systems of the cosmos he also saw declared established and searched out wisdom that's what verse 27 says and there the poem ends the poem ends in verse 27 verse 28 is like a post script doesn't share the same meter of verses 1 to 27 in the hebrew and as the poem ends there it may be that our hopes have been raised for surely if god knows the way to wisdom maybe he will take us there and open our eyes so that we too may know everything and grasp wisdom and find all the answers

to our agonized questions but no in verse 28 we hear the voice of god speaking for the first time in the book since chapter 1 and 2 and this is the first time in the book where god speaks to any human being just look at verse 28 and he god said to man behold the fear of the lord that is wisdom and to turn away from evil is understanding you see what god is doing here in verse 28 he's taking our attention away from any agonized questions that we might have and he's fixing our eyes upon

himself he does not take us by the hand and lead us to the answers rather he calls us to bow down before him the one who knows the answers but chooses not to tell us one commentator puts it like this our eyes are directed away from the search for the architecture of the universe to instead fix them upon the architect we ask why doesn't god answer my question to which god replies turn your gaze and your inquire away from the answer that you want and fix them upon me the god that you must seek if you want to live in this world as a wise person a man or a woman of understanding rather than being a fool do not seek wisdom for its own sake if you were to find it you would become puffed up a puffed up know-it-all so do not seek wisdom says the lord instead seek me my friends let me sum this up and say this this should deeply humble us why because it teaches us that wisdom will never be found in human philosophy and human technology and yet the truth of verse 28 should also be deeply reassuring to us you see right at the start of the book as i said earlier when we saw job we heard that he feared the lord and turned away from evil then twice in chapters one and two we heard the lord god himself in the heavenly courtroom affirm that that was the right thing for job to do and now here in chapter 28 we are told once again that this is what job ought to be doing and what we ourselves ought to be doing in our lives all the time especially when we are in pain and when we are suffering and struggling we should not expect to find the answers to all of our painful questions rather we are to bow low in humble adoration and worship the sovereign lord who knows all things if we do that then we really will be wise people listen again to christopher ash on these verses he says this and that's as i find myself thinking about this all the time this week there is if we may put it like this a distinction between wisdom wisdom with a capital w and wisdom with a small w verse 12 and verse 20 are referring to wisdom with a capital w to have this wisdom is to be god to grasp and understand completely and perfectly the hidden order at the heart of the universe that is the type of wisdom friends that is off limits for you and i because you and i are not god whereas the wisdom of chapter 28 that we are commanded to follow and pursue is what we might call wisdom with a small w to find this wisdom is to live by faith and not by sight bowing down before the creator and looking to him alone friends wisdom with a small w is what we must live by whatever our circumstances when life is good and when life is bad we must always fear the lord and turn away from evil could be that you're here tonight you're a christian and you would honestly say do you know what looking back over my life i've never experienced suffering friend if that's you just wait just wait because i take it the longer that you live the more likely you are to suffer and to suffer more and more when suffering does sweep over your life job 28 wants you not to focus on trying to be like god and wanting wisdom with a capital w rather job 28 wants you to fear the lord to turn away from evil and to bow humbly before your maker and the god who loves you could be tonight that you're here and actually you are currently suffering you're currently going through the mill you're full of pain you're full of perplexity well job 28 pleads with you to do the same thing fear the lord turn away from evil follow the example of job even in the darkness of the mineshaft that he's in right now even as he's in the depths even in the midst of the fiery debates that he's had with his three friends job has always showed himself to be a true believer a man who continuously turns to the lord again and again because he knows that at the end of the day it is the lord who is his only hope he fears the lord and turns away from evil and friends if you're here tonight and if you're doing that then you should be greatly encouraged because you are wise you are walking in wisdom's way don't give up keep going down that path keep following the lord's suffering servant job because really job is a little picture of the lord jesus well let's be quiet for a moment and why don't in the silence we take a few minutes to respond to what we've been hearing from god's word and then i'll pray for us almighty god we praise you that you alone are the god who sees the place where wisdom can be found for you are the sovereign creator the lord of all things you created the whole cosmos everything by the blueprint of wisdom you alone have all knowledge you alone are all wise and we pray that in our lives as disciples of the lord we would not spend our time trying to be like you in the wrong sense but instead we would follow the great example of your suffering servant job that when we are full of painful questions we would turn away from evil and bow the knee down in worship of you the god who is full of compassion and mercy and the god who will vindicate and restore his suffering servants in the end please help us our dear heavenly father to fear you and worship you

[37 : 59] whatever our circumstances and we pray this in jesus name and for his sake amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen