

Sunday March 27th, 2022

Job 28:12-28
“Why Me?”

An Arabic man is helplessly wandering through the desert when he comes across a Jewish tie salesman. "Water! Water!" The Arabic man cries. "I have no water, only ties. Would you like to purchase a tie?" Replies the Jewish tie salesman. "No!" Exclaims the Arabic man, "I need water! Tell me where there's water!" "Are you sure you wouldn't like to buy a tie? I have many colours and right now if you buy two you get a third free?"

"No", the man replied. "I need water". The salesman continued. "These are the very best ties. Hand sown and of finest silk." No ties, only water. Where can I get water?" "Okay. I hear you. I know where there is water. 20 miles east, there is a village with abundance of water there." So, the Arabic man stumbles off into the distance. Sure, enough, he sees the village in the distance and with the last of his energy he pulls himself up the steps of a beautiful hotel. "Water. Please give me water".

The doorman says. "Water. Why we got lots of water. Mineral water, soda water and even many flavoured waters." "Please just bring me plain old water". "Oh, I would if I could," says the doorman but you have to have a tie to get in and be served." Have you ever wanted something so bad that it consumes all your energy, all your attention and all your resources? Like the man in the story, have we sought refreshing water only to be denied and find the well dried up.

And further, like the tie salesman, our friends and family are offering suggestions and actions that do nothing to ease our longing. Job enters chapters 27 and 28 with only, really, one unresolved question. Despite his friends' hurtful words and lack of comfort, Job asks again and again; "Why"? His friends insist it is because Job is an unrepentant sinner. But Job knows in his heart that this is not true.

Chapter 28 is different from all the other chapters. Some scholars believe it was a later inclusion but it does appear to be linked with chapter 27. The three friends of Job were trying to teach Job, but now Job turns the table and tries to teach them. Job challenges their arrogance at ever thinking they could understand the wisdom of God. So, this 28th chapter is a beautiful poem about God's wisdom.

Finding and understanding God is compared to a mining operation. We are invited to consider what is entailed in mining out of the ground precious metals. A mine is dark and it is a mysterious place. A mine is a place of loneliness and potential suffering. Strike the earth at any given point, and you do not know what you shall find. But try we must, to extract the precious bits hidden in the rock.

The only reason people go mining is in the hope they will find something valuable. Thus, Job's anguished questions about "why" this is happening to him, are in essence an act of hope that even the smallest bit of wisdom can be found to answer his question. Other creatures, like lions and falcons do not go mining. They have flown over or walked over the riches buried beneath, but did not seek any of it out.

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So, we are invited to join the search for something of matchless value. I freely admit I know very little about the mining process. I wonder how prospectors know where to look, where to dig. How do they know how to process the ore to get the metal, or gems? How do the miners keep their sanity being so far under the ground, with only one way out and the inherent dangers of mining?

The technology of today is vastly superior to that in Job's day, and this has led to deeper and richer discoveries of buried wealth. However, for Job the question isn't about know-how but rather why. So, thus we finally grasp Job's point. All this talk about mining is really a metaphor for creation. God, in his infinite wisdom made the universe. In our human intellect we are learning new things all the time. Many things I'll never understand.

For a believer we can observe the knowable universe, and marvel at how intricate and beautiful it all is. Humanity has been mining the secrets of this created universe, but one thing is lacking. No matter how much we learn about anything, we still cannot grasp the "why". Why is there a world? Why does it work as it does? Why am I in this world? This is the treasure Job seeks. Everything else is like dross from the refining process.

Jewels are beautiful, and valuable, but for the most part inaccessible. Wisdom is beautiful and priceless, but inaccessible. It's a bit of a catch 22 for Job. Wisdom cannot be found, but it is so valuable it must be found, but it cannot be found. "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" The poem continues with a description of the frustration of finding wisdom.

There is to be no doubt about wisdom's priceless value. We long to understand how the world works and this is even more so for the one who is suffering. Job is sure, if we could just tap into this wisdom, the question of "why" shall be answered. Job can then find out why he has suffered. Yet, you could take all the world's wealth and still you could not purchase this wisdom. You can go to the deepest mine, or to the bottom of the deepest sea, and still, you will not find it.

If we search, we will ultimately fail. Even in the place of the dead (Sheol) we will still not find answers. So, not matter our longing to find the answer to "why", it will forever elude us. So, where then does this task, so passionately the world is pursuing actually take us? Right back to sitting on an ash heap, screaming out the question; why. No living creature can find this answer. The very best we will ever achieve is rumours and idle speculations.

Since our very beginnings, men and women have wanted to find the source of wisdom. Remember in Genesis how we longed for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that we might become like God. We built a tower to the heavens so that we might see hidden things. But it all came to nothing. So, why search? Why go to all this effort, if it only leads to failure. Can you hear Job's frustration and heart ache? All things we too experience.

If this poem in chapter 28 ended here at verse 22, we might be tempted to throw in the towel. To not only stop worrying about answers but to simply stop trying to find meaning in our lives.

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Some people do come to that place. Maybe we have all been touched by such distress. Job, it seems, has ended in a circular loop of paradoxes.

But wait. There is more isn't there? Job has reminded us that finding wisdom, is in many ways a fruitless task, but it is a worthwhile endeavor if it leads to one inescapable conclusion. If we cannot find wisdom, can we find the source of all wisdom? We may not know where wisdom is, but we can know the one who does know where it is? God alone knows the way, and this foreshadows God's speeches at the end of the book.

Like so much that we value in life, it is not what you know, its "who you know". No one knows everything and we generally distrust anyone who is a "know it all". All through our lives we have learned this lesson, but do not apply it to our faith. If, as was my case, I needed some major heart surgery, I can read all about it, think I know everything, but ultimately, I need someone who knows the way. Knows the way to healing.

I do not know how to fix my car, just someone who does. Despite claims on the internet, I do not, nor should not, try to know it all, but rather know the people with the wisdom or knowledge. Job uses the weather as an example; something we all talk about. I actually heard someone once say that "we all talk about the weather, but no one does anything about it." Wind, rain, lightening, thunder: are ambivalent. Some times they destroy, sometimes they bring life.

Even today, with vast supercomputers and satellites, we still struggle to fully understand weather. There is a wild uncontrollable nature to weather. And yet God "gave the wind its weight"; "apportioned the water by measure", "made a decree for the rain" and "made a way for the lightening of the thunder." The weather just points out to us, who really understand the universe; the one who made it.

Wisdom is like the centerpiece jewel in God's crown. So, God speaks for the first time since chapters 1 and 2. And it is the first time he speaks to humans. "And he said to man, 'behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding'". (vs. 28) This is the critical phrase of the whole book of Job. God directs our attention away from our agonizing questions and toward himself.

Stop obsessing about getting answers to your questions, and turn to God as the one you must seek. If you want to live in this world as a wise person, a person of understanding, rather than a fool, do not seek wisdom for its own sake, as it will simply puff you up as a know-it-all. Do not seek wisdom, seek God. This is very humbling. Neither the marvels of human technology, nor the insights of human philosophy yield the ultimate goal, the theory of everything.

But these words are also reassuring. "To turn away from evil" is exactly what Job was doing at the beginning of the book. The whole heavenly courtroom knows this. Even the Satan acknowledges this. But now, all of humanity knows that what Job was doing at the beginning is what we all should be doing. We will not find wisdom, but we can worship the one who created all things.

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The search for wisdom is a waste of time, unless it draws us to God. Seeking wisdom is an act of the intellect, potentially an act of hubris; but seeking God is an act of faith and a life of hope. This is the single struggle of this book of Job and the single struggle of our lives. Can we live with the fact that for all our intellect, we will find no answers to “why”?

Job has now concluded, after listening to his friends, that in trying to offer him everything, they end up offering him nothing. In urging Job to seek wisdom as an end in itself, they have inadvertently advised him to idolatry. Placing something less than God, before God. Paul Tillich, many years ago, made the point that the definition of idolatry is putting anything less than God, higher than God.

In days gone past, we thought of idolatry as making shrines of beasts, or odd fanciful depiction of gods, like the golden calf in Exodus. Even though there are millions of people who still worship idols, like in Hinduism; for the most part we have dismissed idolatry as ancient and quaint. A practice superseded by what? Science, intellect, philosophical speculation. Science is a wonderful thing. It has given us marvelous advances, but it can only go so far.

There are questions we will never answer, and many things we thought were truth, or facts, may be seen as wrong. Christians are not above also falling into idolatry. The bible, or biblical scholarship, can become an end in itself and not the worship of God. Many well-meaning, faithful people, believe whole heartedly that if they only read the bible all the wisdom of God will pour out on them. But even the bible points beyond itself to someone greater, more worthy of our devotion.

Our ultimate call, in life, is not the pursuit of wisdom as priceless as it is, but rather to repentance and the fear of God. This is to be our life long pursuit according to Colossians 2:6. Jesus is the embodiment of all wisdom. “The word became flesh” John reminds us. The priceless treasure of wisdom is revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection. Job is coming slowly to the realization that in his terrible suffering, what he needs and wants are not answers but a relationship.

A relationship with the only one who can make sense of his situation. He wants to know and be known by God. And boy, do we need to know the source of all things, especially when we are hanging on by a thread. There is a story about the world-famous chess master Booby Fisher, which cannot be verified but none the less is interesting. Fisher went with a friend to see a movie called *The Seventh Seal*.

The plot of this classic film directed by Ingmar Bergman, is about a medieval knight who engages in a chess match with death (the evil one). Throughout the film these two make moves on each other. Then, as the movie comes to a climax, the Prince of Darkness makes a move and, with great finality, utters the word, “Checkmate!” And with that the film comes to an end and the curtain comes down.

According to the story, the chess master, who was sitting in the audience, turned to his friend and. In a puzzled tone, exclaimed, “Why is he giving up? The king has one more move! The kind has one magnificent move left that can turn the tide and win the game.” Wow! What words, for all of us to hear.

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This story, true or fictional, speaks to our hearts greatest need. Reassurance. Its what Job has been longing for all along. Its what we long for as well. To a parent whose child is hopelessly hooked on drugs, there is real hope in the message: the King has one more move! To a father whose daughter is being drawn into a life of sexual promiscuity and poor relationships, there is comfort in the words, “The King has one more move!”

To those who watch the news and see the events in the Ukraine and worry that there is no hope; there is comfort in the words, “The King has one more move!” To a church family, mired in discord, torn apart by tension and theological controversies, there is good news-*the King has one more move*. (Campolo-Stories to Feed your Soul, p. 118)

This is what Job is starting to see. That no matter how rough your life is, or what you are dealing with, our King, the very embodiment of wisdom, always, I mean always, has one more move to make.