

# Job 28:28 Sermon script

Charles Shale, 08/01/2023

To start with I'd like to ask everyone – are you a wise person? How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1-10. Show of hands?

The passage from Job 28 is about the *search for wisdom*, and the last verse of it is one of my favourites in the whole Bible.

I've asked if you're a wise person, and some of you rate yourselves pretty highly. But I wonder, if you were to go looking for wisdom, the meaning of life, how to be successful, what's are the really important things to know.. where would you look? *Where* would you go searching?

Is that even something that interests you? Maybe.. maybe not so much. Perhaps you're pretty satisfied with what you know and don't know, and are not too bothered to discover much more. If that's you, don't switch off just yet. For everyone else, I think we have some tremendous answers in our passage today/tonight.

Well I've always loved books, and this week I'm been looking through a few interesting ones we have lying about at home. And I was struck by some of the lines in them. Let me read you a few, and you might have a guess even as to who said them. Some are about our attitudes, some about how to succeed, some are about how to survive, you'll see.

*"Talk about your own mistakes before criticising the other person"* Dale Carnegie

*"We are at our strongest when we dare to show our weakness"* Charlie Mackery

*"To escape from quicksand, stay calm, use small movements to free your legs and then crawl across the surface"* Bear Grylls

*"Great investment opportunities come around when excellent companies are surrounded by unusual circumstances that cause them to be under-priced"* Warren Buffet

*"The answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything.. is 42"* Douglas Adams

The fact is that there are literally thousands of books out there claiming to offer us wisdom – on all sorts of topics – how to succeed, relate to other people, prolong life, find meaning, and yes how to survive in the jungle.

This chapter from Job asks the question: "Where can wisdom be found?"

It's a question I've been interested in for many years. In fact I recall a time when I worked in the city, and at lunch times – this is going to sound pretty nerdy – at lunch times I would go to the nearest bookshop, Dymocks I think it was, and browse through the books there, searching for snippets of information.. that I imagined I had so far missed in life. Maybe one day I'd pick up a book about science, another day history, maybe one of those get-rich-quick books, something on psychology or self-help. I genuinely felt that *if that* many books had been written then surely I must be missing out on some pretty crucial pieces of the puzzle that is life. Was that time well spent?

## **the passage**

At this point in the book of Job, there has been lots of back and forth between Job and his friends, trying to make sense of his suffering. Essentially looking for meaning in it, wisdom to explain why it has happened.

Then in chapter 28 – someone, and it's hard to tell who is speaking here, and perhaps it doesn't matter too much – someone draws a contrast between man's very successful endeavours to mine the earth for precious metals and treasures... and his very unsuccessful attempt to dig for meaning in the world around us.

Let's look at a few of the verses together:

v3: *Mortals put an end to the darkness, they search out the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness*

*v4: Far from human dwellings they cut a shaft, in places untouched by human feet; far from other people they dangle and sway.*

Mankind has gone to extreme lengths to mine for things of worth in the ground. Far from where we live, far beyond where any animal is capable of going. Into places of great danger, dangling and swaying on ropes, down tunnels and shafts deep into the earth.

And it's been an incredibly successful enterprise – we have found silver, gold, ore, copper, precious gems and other treasures. In fact in our country, much of our material wealth can be traced back to the resources under our feet and the extraordinary efforts made to extract and sell them to the rest of the world.

If mankind is that good at searching for the material treasures of the earth, surely the search for wisdom will be a piece of cake? Apparently not.

*v13 [wisdom] cannot be found in the land of the living, v14 The deep says, "It is not in me"; the sea says, "It is not with me.", v21 It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing.*

Wisdom cannot be found anywhere on earth. Certainly not by digging deeper into the ground, or trawling the oceans.

And it cannot be bought, no matter what the price:

*v13 No mortal comprehends its worth, v16 It cannot be bought with the gold, v18 price of wisdom is beyond rubies.*

So it cannot be found on earth, and it cannot be bought.

What exactly are we talking about here? What sort of wisdom are we searching for?

I read out a bunch of quotes earlier – how about to relate well to others, survive in the wild, get rich.. Surely that's pretty handy wisdom to have in mind?

This chapter is not saying that man has no knowledge or wisdom – each of us knows all sorts of useful facts and life lessons.

The writer of Job is talking about something far greater – a wisdom much deeper, more profound. And a sort of wisdom that we really, *really* need.

I'm going to break with protocol for this series and briefly mention another of my favourites verses that gives us a clue to what is being spoken of here in Job.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

*[God] has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

That is, we may have all sorts of useful wisdom for life at our finger tips – the sort that we can figure out from the world around us.

And yet we all have a sense that there is something much bigger, far deeper and more important that we're missing. Ingrained in us is a sense of the eternal, of a spiritual world, of a Being who sees the big picture. It has frustrated many a wise man, philosopher, and the likes of us – having a sense that there is something more, but not being able to fathom what God can see.

That is what Job 28 is getting out. We have no chance of finding that sort of wisdom on earth, not of buying it with precious stones. Certainly not by browsing in a bookshop at lunchtime. Faced with that reality, if I were to ask each of you again – how wise are you on a scale of 1-10, our answers ought to be a lot closer to zero.

However, as the writer goes onto say, we do have a chance of discovering this wisdom:

*v23 God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells*

Sometime after creation, or so it seems,

v27 [God] looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it

and

v28 And he [told it] to the human race

These are profound verses. They tell us that God alone is the source of true wisdom. It originates from Him.

He has “appraised, confirmed and tested it”. That is, we are to understand that he rates it very highly! It is trustworthy, meaningful, valuable, practical, and knowing God – it is good. It is good for us.

These verses, as well as being profound, are extremely humbling for anyone who might think themselves wise by their own understanding – from what they’ve learned or discovered from the world around us. We are called to acknowledge that without God our wisdom is desperately lacking. Let’s say on the wisdom scale we are a little less than 1 out of 10.

And this wisdom from God – he’s not kept it to himself – it has been given to us, to whole of the human race.

And it’s remarkably and beautifully simple:

v28 *“The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”*

Done, easy, all make sense? More or less?

It is easy enough to understand immediately, for a young child to understand. And yet in those words are all the majesty, complexity and holiness and grace of God, that we can take a lifetime just to scratch the surface of, let alone put into practice.

Now there’s no elaboration on this verse at this point in Job. We have to go elsewhere in the Old Testament to understand more what it means to fear the Lord and shun evil.

I can think of 2 images that help us understand this revelation and command:

In Exodus 33, Moses boldly asks God to show him his glory. God’s response is to grant his request – promising that his goodness will pass Moses by, but warns him of the danger of seeing him face to face.

In Isaiah 6, the prophet is given an image of the throne room of God – his immediate response is to fall down in terror at the majesty and holiness of God.

These 2 images help us see Job 28:28 more clearly – the right response to seeing and understanding God is to be overwhelmed by his very being, and acutely aware of his holiness... and our unholiness.

Listen to these verses from Deuteronomy 6 – about the gift that God’s wisdom is. How we are to treat it and in doing so how we are to fear the Lord and shun evil:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

God’s wisdom is a gift from heaven. We are to stand in awe of who He is, and we can do that by treasuring his commands and living them out. He defines what holiness is, and is the antithesis of evil. And so to obey his commands is to shun evil.

### **gospel impact**

When Job and his friends spoke or heard verse 28, they would have been reminded of passages like that from Deuteronomy (and Exodus). That was the essence of what it meant to fear God and shun evil for God’s people back then.

We of course live on the other side of the cross, the other side of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and with his coming brings a clarity and power to that verse that is astonishing.

John in the first chapter of his gospel describes Jesus as the Word of God, life and the light to mankind, the ultimate source of truth. Literally a gift from heaven into a dark world.

Recall from our passage that true wisdom cannot be found on earth by any of us. But God chose to reveal his wisdom to us most clearly through Jesus. If you want to see the wisdom that God has "*tested, confirmed and appraised*" (v27) – then look at the life and teachings of Jesus. The gospels are full of conversations, parables, instructions that are truly remarkable for their insight into what God is like and what our greatest need are.

When we read the gospels we don't find so much about how to get rich, escape from quicksand, win friends and influence people. But we find something far, far better – worth way more than precious stones. Something everlasting, something to help us in a world filled with evil. Something that helps us fathom what God is doing in history.

God chooses to reveal himself most fully to us in Jesus, and so Jesus is the clearest way to make sense of Job 28:28 – that is, where to find wisdom.

But what does fearing the Lord and shunning evil look like, when we see Jesus?

There's no doubt that Jesus was at times someone who invoked fear and awe. Two weeks ago we celebrated the birth of a baby, laid in a manger. Fast-forward a few years and this same Jesus is casting out demons, storming the temple, calming storms, and bring the dead back to life. He was certainly one to be in awe of.

But on the cross he took on the full wrath of God and bore our sin, defeating death and the Devil for good. He then rose again and ascended into heaven as the eternal King. Many were rightly in awe of Jesus before he was arrested. But in those next 3 days, any concept they had of being in awe of Jesus was totally blown out of the water. Given what Jesus did, the call to "fear the Lord" takes on a radically new meaning.

Now He is one to kneel before, acknowledging our desperate need to repent and receive forgiveness. Now He is one to pledge our lives to as our Lord, and obey his commands. God has set a day when He will judge the world by his appointed king, this same Jesus.

So "*fear of the Lord*" takes on its ultimate meaning with the coming of Jesus.

And the good news, the great news, is that by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we are able to shun evil and obey his commands – through God's forgiveness and the work of the Spirit in our lives. And we can even have a role to play in helping slow evil in the world, while we wait for the return of Jesus when it will finally be gone forever.

## **conclusion**

So, where can wisdom be found? Real wisdom?

Not on this earth. Despite people looking for it in bookshops or podcasts, experiences, travelling to far-flung places, meditating, listening to philosophers or influencers. Not on this earth.

God has tested and confirmed wisdom. It is found in his Son, the Lord Jesus. In fearing him, accepting him as Saviour and obeying him as Lord we find true wisdom and the most precious treasure in one.

So then there's 2 questions for us:

1. What are you searching for?

If it's wisdom then have a mind that it's the right sort. As you step out the door and glance at your phone, talk to your friends, pick up a book... maybe you'll find something interesting and useful, sure. But we can so easily fill our minds and attention with information of little actual value.

Is what we're searching for, is what we're find live-giving, everlasting wisdom from heaven?

If you're focused on searching for something quite different, or are content not to search at all, then can I challenge you to consider picking up a gospel and seeing what you make of Jesus yourself.

2. Second question – how wise are you on that scale of 1-10? If you accept Jesus and Lord Saviour, then I'd say you're well over a 9 out of 10. That just leaves a little room for working that out in practice over your life. Making every effort to have his commands written on your heart, impressed on your children, written over the doorframes of your houses.

*Where then does wisdom come from? God looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it. And he said to the human race, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding Amen.*