

Study 4: Job 28 – A word about wisdom

There are few things in the world more irritating than a traffic jam. There you are, sitting in your car, going nowhere, achieving nothing.

That's the sort of feeling we have by the time we reach Job 28. The discussion between Job and his friends is going nowhere and seems to be achieving nothing. Job's friends are convinced that his suffering is the result of a secret, unconfessed sin, whereas Job maintains that no such sin exists. Neither side is budging.

It's at this point that chapter 28 blows through the book like a breath of fresh air. The chapter comes right in the centre of Job's last speech to his friends. It bursts into the book with a fresh perspective that will help us understand the main lesson of the book.

Before we look at Job 28, however, let's look at some connections between Job and wisdom.

Read Proverbs 3:1-20.

1. What does this chapter say about:

- a. the value of wisdom?
- b. the characteristics of a wise person?
- c. the results of a wise life?

Look back at Job 1:1-5.

2. In what ways was Job portrayed as the perfect example of a wise man?

It can be seen from Proverbs that when the Bible speaks of 'wisdom', it is referring to something more than academic knowledge. Being wise is not about getting good marks at school or university. Wisdom is practical knowledge. It is knowing how to get the most out of life. This is because wisdom taps into the principles and patterns of creation (Prov 3:19-20). Wisdom is based on understanding how the world operates (because it is God's world), and therefore how to live best within it.

Let us discover now what Job 28 has to say about wisdom.

Read Job 28.

3. From verses 1-11:

- a. What things of value are these verses about?
- b. Where can they be found?
- c. In what ways are man's achievements impressive?

4. From verses 12-28:

- a. What thing of value is now being discussed? How does it compare with the precious things discussed in the earlier verses?
- b. Where can it be found (v. 28)?
- c. What does it mean to "fear" the Lord?

The big idea of Job

The climax of Job 28 is that wisdom comes from God. This makes sense. Since it is God who created everything, he more than anyone should know what is wise and what is foolish. Only God can truly know the best way to live within his creation. True wisdom is therefore to fear the Lord (v. 28). In other words, the best way to negotiate this life is by living in reverent submission to the One who made us.

Within the book of Job, the importance of true wisdom takes on added dimensions. Coming as it does at the close of a debate about why Job is suffering, Job 28 emphasizes the idea that true wisdom is not a matter of knowing why suffering happens; rather, true wisdom is a matter of knowing the God who knows why suffering happens. The appropriate way to approach suffering is therefore not to seek an explanation for it, but to seek to know God better through the experience. For knowing God is infinitely better than not suffering.

Not only is this the climax of Job 28, it is also the lesson of the entire book of Job. The book revolves around the idea that if we want to live this life to the full, it is not a matter of knowing why things happen; instead it is a matter of knowing the God who knows why things happen. The wise person cannot necessarily explain why everything in life happens, but the wise person is in a right relationship with God. This is a critically important lesson which we will return to again and again in our last two studies. It is also a lesson that helps us understand how the book of Job points us forward to Jesus Christ.

5. According to 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, what is God's wisdom? How is this different from what Jews and Greeks expect or desire?

6. Compare Proverbs 3:19-20 with Colossians 1:15-20. What parallels are there between Jesus Christ and wisdom?

Jesus and wisdom

If the most important thing is not to know why we are suffering, but to know and fear God, then how do we know God? Jesus is how we can most fully know God.

We have already seen that Jesus is the great biblical example of undeserved suffering (cf. 1 Pet 2:19-23). However, in Jesus we also see the supreme example of God's wisdom, for in defiance of all worldly wisdom, God chose to save people and bring them to know himself through the suffering and death of his Son on the cross (1 Cor 1:18-2:10).

Through Jesus, we are reconciled to God and enter into the fullness of life as God has intended it (Col 2:9-10). In Christ, we can experience every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3), and we are able to enter into God's eternal kingdom which will never fade or perish (1 Cor 1:18ff). In Christ, we also have everything we need to know for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). These are wonderful truths. When we know Jesus, we are at the heart of God's plan and goal for his creation. This is why Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God.

Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to discuss in your group.)

7. The most important thing is not to know why we are suffering, but to know God better while we are suffering. What are some ways in which suffering can help us to know God better?

8. If Jesus is the wisdom of God and knowing Jesus is so wonderful, why is it that we often feel the need for more in our lives?

9. What are some practical ways that we can help each other remember the greatness of following Jesus?

Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God. Pray that we would continue to grow in our dependence on him.
- Pray that we would be better equipped to handle suffering in our lives and the lives of others.