**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE ROLE OF WISDOM IN SUFFERING**

**Job 27-28**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we come to our tenth sermon in this series and the beginning of Job’s final speech. Job has spoken of many things. He has lamented the day of his birth, he has complained about his friends, he has defended his innocence, he has questioned God’s justice, and he has expressed his hope for a Redeemer.

Now as Job begins his final speech, his focus shifts to a topic that hasn’t really been addressed so far in this book. And yet, it is a central theme of Job and a major lesson for those who are enduring through long, difficult seasons of suffering. That topic is wisdom.

Wisdom is defined by the world as the ability to provide insight that produces desired results. If someone gives you good advice regarding a marriage problem, you say that the person had wisdom. If someone helps you work through a personal struggle like laziness, guilt, or lack of purpose, you say that the person had wisdom. By the world’s standards, wisdom is measured by its results. We know someone is wise if they have the ability to make our problems go away.

The Bible’s view of wisdom is much more nuanced. Yes, biblical wisdom helps us understand, diagnose, and resolve our problems, but it does much more than that, because biblical wisdom isn’t just about problem-solving. It’s about how we relate to God. It’s about how we let our knowledge of God shape our knowledge of the world and how we are to live in it.

You could say that worldly wisdom is horizontally focused. It’s all about us. It’s about the problems we have, and the solutions we want. But biblical wisdom is vertically focused. It’s all about God. It’s about understanding who God is, and letting that shape our understanding of who we are, what the world is like, and how we are to live within it.

That includes how we are to suffer within it, because to live in the world is to suffer in the world. Biblical wisdom equips us to suffer well. That doesn’t mean that it just teaches us to grin and bear it or ignore it. But it does mean that we begin to see our suffering differently, in a way that deepens our faith rather than diminishing it.

The title of this sermon is **The Role of Wisdom in Suffering.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Limits of Human Wisdom
2. The Treasure of Divine Wisdom

(1) **THE LIMITS OF HUMAN WISDOM**

Chapter 27 is an example of what happens when we apply human wisdom to our life’s difficulties. It begins with Job making his most forceful defence of his innocence yet.

**1**And Job again took up his discourse, and said:

**2**“As God lives, who has taken away my right,
    and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,
**3**as long as my breath is in me,
    and the spirit of God is in my nostrils,
**4**my lips will not speak falsehood,
    and my tongue will not utter deceit.
**5**Far be it from me to say that you are right;
    till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
**6**I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go;
    my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

Job is swearing an oath to not give into his friends’ accusations. He’s swearing that as certainly as God lives, he will not give up his integrity by confessing to sins that he didn’t commit.

His oath captures his conflicting feelings towards God. On the one hand, he calls God the one “who has taken away my right” and “who has made my soul bitter”. But on the other hand, he acknowledges God as the creator and sustainer of his life as well. It is “the spirit of God”, literally “the breath of God” that is in his nostrils, a reference to the creation story in Genesis 2 when God forms the first man out of the dust and breathes into his nostrils. God is both the afflicter and the sustainer of his life, the one who makes his soul bitter and gives his soul life.

Job then launches into what we call an “imprecatory prayer”, a prayer calling down God’s vengeance on one’s enemies. It’s quite a common element of many of the Psalms. The Psalmists often pray that God would destroy their enemies, or strike down their persecutors, or bring his divine justice on those who have oppressed them. What distinguishes Job’s prayer is that he’s calling down these curses on men who call themselves his friends.

**7**“Let my enemy be as the wicked,
    and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous.

When Job references “my enemy” in verse 7, he’s referring to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. We know that because Job switches tenses in verses 11 and 12:

**11**I will teach you concerning the hand of God;
    what is with the Almighty I will not conceal.
**12**Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves;
    why then have you become altogether vain?

Job is ready to call down the curse of God on his three friends because it feels like they’ve become his enemies. He wasn’t that far off the mark. Scholars have called the friends “Satan’s prosecutors”. Satan may not have spoken since Chapter 2, but his fingerprints are all over the three friends’ words. They accuse Job and condemn him, just like Satan does. The Book of Revelation calls Satan “the accuser of our brothers”, because he has no power or authority over our souls. He can only bring our list of sins before the throne of God and accuse us of not being worthy of eternal life.

Job’s friends have done the same. They accuse him of doing wicked things, so that they can defend their claim that he deserves what he has received. In doing so, they have made Job feel like they have become his enemies.

I wonder if you’ve ever experienced something like that before. Perhaps it’s a close friend who has betrayed you, or an adult child who has rejected you. Perhaps it’s your husband or your wife, when in the heat of an argument you start doubting whether this person who pledged their life to you really loves you. It’s a sad reality of life that those who are meant to be for us can seem like they are against us.

How do we respond to that? We often respond like Job. Verse 7:

**7**“Let my enemy be as the wicked,
    and let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous.

Job is praying that what happens to the wicked would happen to his friends. He describes this in detail in verses 13-23, and it’s not pretty. He hopes that their children will die and starve, their wealth will rot, and their homes will blow away like a cocoon. He hopes that creation itself will rally against them and terrify them with its hostility.

We may not get that specific ourselves, but in the end we want the same thing. We want justice. We want people to feel what we feel, to hurt like we hurt, because that’s what seems fair.

This is what human wisdom calls for. It calls for an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. It calls for absolute equality of outcome, for people to get what they deserve, for people to get a taste of their own medicine. Job may not know this, but he’s actually fallen into the same trap as his friends. What they were saying to him, he’s now saying to them: they deserve to suffer, to lose what they love, and to see their legacy rot away.

There is certainly a place for justice. The Psalmists weren’t all sinning when they prayed that God would repay their enemies with wrath. Indeed, there is something virtuous about praying for justice without seeking it for yourself. As Paul said in Romans 12:19:

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will replay, says the Lord.’”

We are never to avenge ourselves, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t care about justice. It means that we leave justice with God, because it is God’s role to judge, not ours.

Our role is to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, bless those who curse us. Or as Paul continues in Romans 12:20-21:

“To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Job’s problem isn’t that he prayed for justice against his three friends. His problem was that justice is all he wanted for them. He didn’t want them to be redeemed, or forgiven, or restored to a knowledge of the truth. He just wanted them to suffer.

But that’s not what God had in mind for them. If you know how the book ends, you know that God confirms that Job was in the right, and his friends were in the wrong. And yet, God doesn’t repay the three friends as Job hoped he would. He doesn’t bring the sword upon their children or rot upon their wealth. No, he turns away his wrath from them and forgives them after the atoning work of a sacrifice and the mediating work of Job’s prayer.

If the Book of Job teaches us anything about God, it’s that God isn’t like us, and that is a wonderfully comforting truth. When we cry out for justice in our bloodlust and desire for vengeance, God turns and redeems. When we want punishment, God offers his forgiveness. Such is the heart of God that no one is too far from his mercy. No one can outrun his grace.

This is the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom. Human wisdom oversimplifies and says it always has to be *this* way *all* the time. Evil must *always* be punished. Good deeds must *always* be rewarded. People must *always* get what they deserve. But God doesn’t operate on the basis of human wisdom. He operates on the basis of divine wisdom, where there is a time for justice, and a time for mercy; a time for wrath, and a time for grace.

(2) **THE TREASURE OF DIVINE WISDOM**

But how do we get more of this divine wisdom? How do we stop operating on the basis of our sinful perception of what should happen and start living and thinking the way God does? This leads to our second point.

Chapter 28 is one of the most beautiful poems in all of Scripture on the priceless value of true, biblical wisdom, and it’s a foreshadowing of the main point of the Book of Job as a whole. Out of all Job’s speeches, this is the only chapter that doesn’t contain any complaint, or grief, or lament. It’s just a beautiful meditation on wisdom. It is as if Job has reached a rare moment of clarity when he finally sees things as they really are and finds peace in the midst of his suffering.

Job begins with a reflection on human innovation and exploration:

**1**“Surely there is a mine for silver,
    and a place for gold that they refine.
**2**Iron is taken out of the earth,
    and copper is smelted from the ore.
**3**Man puts an end to darkness
    and searches out to the farthest limit
    the ore in gloom and deep darkness.
**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; they swing to and fro.

Job is amazed at human ingenuity, and he’s calling us to join him. When you stop and think about what human beings have done to cultivate the earth and to steward its resources, it’s not that hard. We’re not just hunters and gatherers. We’re miners. We dig deep into the earth to find metals like iron, silver and gold, and then we find uses for them to build bridges, cars, and skyscrapers. God has given us an incredible ability to take what he has placed on the earth and to make something new and useful with it.

And yet, despite all our exploration, discovery, and ingenuity, no matter how far or hard we look, we can’t find the one thing that matters most, the one thing that far exceeds everything else in the world in value. Verses 12-14:

**12**“But where shall wisdom be found?
    And where is the place of understanding?
**13**Man does not know its worth,
    and 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.’

It doesn’t matter if you drill a hole deep into the earth’s core or build an underwater vessel that can comb the bottom of the ocean. You will never find wisdom.

You can’t buy it either. Verses 15-19:

**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.
**18**No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
    the price of wisdom is above pearls.
**19**The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
    nor can it be valued in pure gold.

Wisdom is not for sale. You can’t hire a tutor who will teach you wisdom. You can’t buy a mountaintop retreat to meditate on wisdom. You can’t exchange all the wealth in the world for a single ounce of wisdom.

So if you can’t find it, and you can’t buy it, where does it come from? Verses 20-22 say that we won’t find wisdom in the land of the living, and we won’t find wisdom in the realms of the dead. Even if you were to personify Death or speak to Abaddon, the “angel of the bottomless pit” (Rev. 9:11), you would only hear a rumour of it.

So where can we find it? Job finally tells us in verse 23. This wisdom can only be learned from God himself:

**23**“God understands the way to it,
    and he knows its place.
**24**For he looks to the ends of the earth
    and sees everything under the heavens.
**25**When he gave to the wind its weight
    and apportioned the waters by measure,
**26**when he made a decree for the rain
    and a way for the lightning of the thunder,
**27**then he saw it and declared it;
    he established it, and searched it out.

Notice where God sees wisdom. He sees it when he “looks to the ends of the earth” and “sees everything under the heavens”. He sees it when he gives weight to the wind, portions out the waters, or decrees thunder and lighting. He declares that it is there, because he’s the one who established it.

In other words, wisdom is found in creation, because God has infused his wisdom into creation. He has infused it into the physical part of his creation, and he has infused it into the moral and spiritual parts of creation as well. God’s wisdom is built into both the earth and the heavens, both the seen and the unseen. That is why we can search the entire world and not find wisdom. We can find it in glimpses here and there. Proverbs tells us we can see it in the hardworking ants or the stately prowling lions, but we can’t see it all. Only God sees it all, and he sees it everywhere, because he sees everything in the physical, moral, and spiritual parts of creation.

Job’s poem on wisdom ends with a quotation from God himself:

**28**And he said to man,
‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
    and to turn away from evil is understanding.’”

Wisdom isn’t found in a place, in the dark mines of the earth or the high reaches of heaven. It’s found in a person. It’s not found in conversations or seminars with self-help gurus, or corporate consultants, or the seemingly wise sages of the earth. It’s found in a worshipful relationship with God.

That’s what it means to “fear the Lord”. To fear the Lord isn’t to cower away in terror. It’s to tremble with delight at the awesome power and infinite wisdom of a Holy God and to come near in worship. It’s to be aware that we are in the presence of perfect, undiluted greatness, a divine being who is like us but so unlike us at the same time. It’s to recognize that this is the one true, living God, the One who could devastate us with a word, or save us by his grace.

This is where wisdom is found. It is found in a right relationship with God that is characterized by wonder, awe, and submission. It’s a relationship that recognizes that God is God, and we are not, and we could never approach him if he didn’t invite us to. We could never look upon him and live if he didn’t lift up our eyes to behold his glory.

Job teaches us that wisdom isn’t knowing all the answers. Wisdom is knowing the One who has the answers but often chooses to conceal them from us. It’s found in giving up our claim to be wise, and submitting to the one who is truly wise, so that his wisdom increasingly comes to change the way we see the world, our lives, and our suffering.

That changes what we believe and how we live. When we live in the fear of the Lord, we give up the belief that we’re entitled to know why things happen to us, and we also give up the belief that we know what’s best for ourselves. That’s why verse 28 says that wisdom includes turning away from evil.

When we think that we know what’s best for ourselves, we embrace evil, because our sinful nature loves what is evil. But when we stop trusting in ourselves and live in the fear of the Lord, we start living according to God’s will.

Wise knowledge and wise living always go together. That’s why Job is described in Chapters 1 and 2 as a man who “fears the Lord and turns away from evil”. He “turns away from evil” because he trusts that what God has said is evil is in fact bad for him. You can’t be wise and living in unrepentant sin at the same time. You can’t be wise and reject what the Bible teaches about good and evil. Wise knowledge and wise living always go together, and they are only seen in those who trust God and not themselves.

Proverbs 3:7 says:

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD; and turn away from evil.”

When we learn to live in the fear of the Lord, we begin to understand just how different God’s wisdom is from our wisdom. We begin to understand that God’s wisdom isn’t ultimately displayed in the depths of the sea or in the heights of heaven. It’s displayed on a hill called Calvary, where a crucified King hung on the cross for sinners like us.

This is the wisdom of God. It isn’t just God on his throne, high and lifted up. It is Christ beaten, betrayed, and crucified. It is Christ abandoned, mocked, and afflicted. It is Christ rejected as foolish by the wisdom of the world to show just how far we are from true wisdom.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)

God’s wisdom has always been manifested in weakness: weakness in Christ, and weakness in those who trust him. The more we come to fear the Lord and turn away from evil, the more we will come to see God’s wisdom displayed in our suffering, just as God’s wisdom was displayed in Christ’s suffering.

God’s wisdom is not our wisdom. It is so different from our wisdom that what we call foolish, God calls wise; and what we call wise, God calls foolish.

This is the key to understanding and persevering through our suffering. Those who don’t know God’s wisdom only see pain and inconvenience in their suffering. But those who fear the Lord and turn away from evil see purpose and even joy, because we know that God is the one who has ordained it. He has planned it, measured it, and dispensed it in his infinite, perfect wisdom for our good and for his glory, just as he did for Jesus.

**CONCLUSION**

If you’ve never put your trust in Jesus before, I invite you to do so today. I invite you to know the One whose wisdom and power are manifested not in strength, but in weakness: in Christ’s weakness on the cross, and in your weakness in your suffering. You will find in Jesus Christ a Saviour you could never imagine. He is a Saviour of the weak, the broken, and the sinful. He condemns the strong, opposes the proud, and forsakes those who trust in themselves. But he welcomes the weak, gives grace to the humble, and dwells with those who are broken. Come to Jesus, and he will forgive you, restore you, and sustain you.

For those who have already put their trust in Christ, let these chapters in Job ignite a hunger in your heart for wisdom.

Wisdom takes time, and it takes effort. It can’t be downloaded, purchased, or copied. It must be learned. We can learn some of it from experienced, wise believers, because “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise” (Proverbs 13:20), but it is best learned by walking with the One who is all-wise.

Wisdom is learned through a daily pursuit of God himself. It is learned in the daily cultivation of the awe and wonder of the fear of the Lord. It is learned in beholding the wisdom of God in our crucified Saviour who died in our place for our sins.

I close with these verses from Proverbs 2:4-6:

**“**if you seek it like silver
    and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
    and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
    from his mouth come knowledge and understanding”