

It's incredible the lengths that some people will go to in order to get what they value.

Last week I read in the news about a group of young people who'd camped out in tents for the past 5 months outside a stadium in Buenos Aires in Argentina.

They've had to deal with unhappy parents, public criticism, rowdy soccer fans and the challenges of sleeping rough on the uncomfortable concrete.

But they haven't been there because they are homeless and have nowhere else to go. Instead they are dedicated Swifties, fans of the singer Taylor Swift. And so they've been there just to get a better chance of being as close to the stage as possible at her concert.

Now maybe we can't understand that level of dedication and commitment to a pop star - that you'd give up 5 months of your life just get a little bit closer to her. But many people do sacrifice so much in order to get what they value.

In one of his last speeches Job also talked about this - how men will go to great lengths, risking everything, to get precious metals and jewels.

But Job knew that there was something more valuable than any of those things. More valuable than silver or gold or gems, or even a Taylor Swift concert. But the problem is that no matter how much time and effort we dedicate to it, we can't get this on our own. It is out of reach of even the most dedicated of us.

For this great treasure, we need to depend on the one person who person knows the way to it.

Job 28:1-19: "There is a mine for silver  
and a place where gold is refined.

<sup>2</sup>Iron is taken from the earth,  
and copper is smelted from ore.

<sup>3</sup>Man puts an end to the darkness;  
he searches the farthest recesses  
for ore in the blackest darkness.

<sup>4</sup>Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft,  
in places forgotten by the foot of man;  
far from men he dangles and sways.

<sup>5</sup>The earth, from which food comes,  
is transformed below as by fire;

<sup>6</sup>sapphires come from its rocks,  
and its dust contains nuggets of gold.

<sup>7</sup>No bird of prey knows that hidden path,  
no falcon's eye has seen it.

<sup>8</sup>Proud beasts do not set foot on it,  
and no lion prowls there.

<sup>9</sup>Man's hand assaults the flinty rock  
and lays bare the roots of the mountains.

<sup>10</sup>He tunnels through the rock;  
his eyes see all its treasures.

<sup>11</sup>He searches the sources of the rivers  
and brings hidden things to light.

<sup>12</sup>"But where can wisdom be found?  
Where does understanding dwell?

<sup>13</sup>Man does not comprehend its worth;  
it cannot be found in the land of the living.

<sup>14</sup>The deep says, 'It is not in me';  
the sea says, 'It is not with me.'

<sup>15</sup>It cannot be bought with the finest gold,  
nor can its price be weighed in silver.

<sup>16</sup>It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir,  
with precious onyx or sapphires.

<sup>17</sup> Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it,  
nor can it be had for jewels of gold.

<sup>18</sup> Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention;  
the price of wisdom is beyond rubies.

<sup>19</sup> The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it;  
it cannot be bought with pure gold.

### 1. The Superiority of Wisdom

This poem starts with talking about gold and silver. But clearly, that's not the focus of it. This speech is all about wisdom. According to Job, wisdom is far more important than anything else that people treasure. "It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver." Job 28:15

If you had \$51.7 million, then this week, at an auction in New York City, you could have bought a Ferrari GTO from 1962 that raced at Le Mans. And that would have been a bargain compared to the most expensive car ever sold at auction: A 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR which sold for \$142 million last year.

So if you have lots of money you can buy fancy cars and a heap of other stuff. But it doesn't matter how much money you have, you could never afford to buy wisdom. It's far more valuable. Far more precious. "Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her." Proverbs 8:11

#### a) What is it?

So what is wisdom? Well, it's about how life really works. It is the way to live a life that is successful, that is blessed, that is ultimately happy: "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding." Proverbs 3:13

And that's always important, but especially when things go wrong. I don't know that much about how laptops work. It would be good for me to know more. It would help me get the best out of it. But usually I manage with the little understanding I have.

But when it stops working, I need to find someone who really understands how it is designed, what each part does and how they should work together. Only someone with that kind of understanding can diagnose the problem and find a solution.

That's kind of like what wisdom is. It is the understanding of how life works. How it's designed. What the purpose of it is. How it all comes together to accomplish the overall plan.

#### b) Why is it important?

This is what Job had been struggling with. He'd lost everything. His wealth, business, reputation, family, friends and health. His whole life was in a mess. And that was incredibly painful.

But as we've seen over the past few weeks, his deeper struggle was about the why?

"Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" Job 3:11

"Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?" Job 13:24

"Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?" Job 21:7

"Why has this happened to me? Why am I suffering? Why don't you help?" His problem was that his experience didn't fit with his understanding of the world. It didn't fit with how he thought life should work.

He thought that because God is sovereign and just, then good people like him should not suffer in this world. And so he felt unjustly condemned by God!

So he longed for was a chance to meet God face to face and hash it out.

"If only I knew where to find him;

if only I could go to his dwelling!

<sup>4</sup> I would state my case before him

and fill my mouth with arguments.

<sup>5</sup> I would find out what he would answer me,

and consider what he would say." Job 23:3-5

Job wanted God to explain himself. He wanted to understand why this had happened. He wanted wisdom!

And I think we long for the same.

- We want to know how life works, how to live a good life, a life that is secure, satisfying and significant.
- But we also want to be able to make sense of the tough times. We want to be able to understand what is happening to us. How to get through it. How to be blessed in it.

And that is far more important than all the money in this world.

## 2. The Search of Wisdom

So wisdom is priceless. But our problem is, that it is also inaccessible. Job illustrated this by thinking about mining. “There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined.” Job 28:1

People go to great lengths to search for things like gold and silver, iron, sapphire, coral, jasper and topaz. “He searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness.” Job 28:3

They dig deep shafts. Go down into the darkness. Tunnel through the rocks. Into places where no birds or animals go looking and no people live. “Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft... far from men he dangles and sways.” Job 28:4

It is a dangerous and difficult search. But they do this because they believe that they can find those treasures and they will be worth it. They believe that these precious metals and gems are worth risking everything for.

And of course it continues today. The global mining industry is reportedly worth over \$2 trillion dollars worldwide.

### a) Inaccessible

But we can't do that with wisdom. “But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?” Job 28:12

Wisdom is supremely valuable. It is crucial if we want to understand how to live a successful life. But we can't just go searching for it. “It cannot be found in the land of the living.” Job 28:13

Wisdom is hidden from us. No matter how much we look, how many books we study, how many lectures we attend, how much time we spend thinking and pondering, how deep we dig for it, we will never find it ourselves.

Some people go travelling to find it. But Job said that even if we could go to the extreme places of this world, we never will: “The deep says, ‘It is not in me’; the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’” Job 28:14

Other people claim that wisdom is found by those who go through extreme events, near death experiences. But Job said, that even if destruction and death could speak, they would declare that, “Only a rumour of it has reached our ears.” Job 28:22

Of course this is not accepted by the world. There is no end to people who'll claim to be able to provide us the understanding and wisdom that we need, especially if we're willing to pay for it.

This was the lie of the serpent to Eve in the Garden of Eden. He claimed that if she ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:4

And Eve took that fruit and ate of it, in part because she saw that it was “desirable for gaining wisdom.” Genesis 3:6. But that act didn't lead to a successful life, but a disastrous one.

### b) Impossible

The wisdom of this world will never be good enough. We have seen this with Job's friends. They claimed to be wise. They claimed to know how life works and why Job was suffering.

But they were wrong. They were “Miserable comforters.” Job 16:2 and “Worthless physicians.” Job 13:4. They did more harm than good because they didn't understand.

No wonder proverbs says, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Proverbs 26:12

And we need to make sure that we're not fooled by those who claim to be wise in this world.

### 3. The Source of Wisdom

So no matter how much we search, we can't find wisdom in ourselves or in this world. And so Job asked again: "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?" Job 28:20

#### a) From God

But he gave us the answer in v23: "God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells." Job 28:23

We can't find wisdom in ourselves or in this world. Nobody can tell us where to find it. Only God knows the path to it and the place where it lives.

That's because:

"He views the ends of the earth

and sees everything under the heavens.

<sup>25</sup> When he established the force of the wind

and measured out the waters,

<sup>26</sup> when he made a decree for the rain

and a path for the thunderstorm." Job 28:24-26

This week Storm Debi showed the destructive power of the wind and rain. Thankfully Met Éireann were able to warn of its approach and so most people were prepared.

But even with all their technology, they can only really predict our weather a few days in advance. And even then, they're not completely accurate.

But God is the one who is in control of our seemingly random and chaotic weather systems. He decides on the force of the wind, the boundaries of the water, the amount of rain that falls, the power and direction of the lightning.

God alone is the architect, designer and sustainer of this world. And so he alone has determined how it works. "Then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it." Job 28:27

This world didn't match with what Job expected, or Job's friends. It certainly didn't match with what Satan claimed. But this world works according to God's understanding. Like a skilled jeweller he is the one who saw and evaluated wisdom. He set it up and examined it.

And so only God can make sense of it. As Job said earlier: "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his." Job 12:13

#### b) Through Christ

As we'll see next week, Job understood this more fully when God finally turned up and spoke to him. It was only then that Job realised that he'd no right to judge God, because only God had the wisdom to understand what was right.

And similarly, if we want to live a wise life, then we need to look beyond ourselves, beyond the wisdom of this world. We need to God to reveal himself to us. And that is what he has done in the person of "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Colossians 2:3

It is in Jesus that we will find the way that life works, that we will understand the truth, that we will be able to live a blessed life. He alone could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6

### 4. The Specifics of Wisdom

And what does that blessed life look like? Well, speaking of God, Job said,

"And he said to man,

'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,

and to shun evil is understanding.'" Job 28:28

This is what wisdom looks like. Reverence and repentance.

#### a) Reverence

The fear of the Lord is not about terror or dread that drives us away from him. Rather it is about a reverence and deep respect for God that leads us to long to worship and honour him. As we read in the book of Hebrews: "Let us be thankful,

and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” Hebrews 12:28

This is the correct attitude that we should express because of who God is and what he has done. It means we humbly bow before him and accept that he is God and we are not! That the Lord was right when he said, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9

That is what we need to do when suffering comes. Fearing God means that we’re not surprised when God acts in ways that we cannot understand. But we’re willing to trust him anyway.

It is about a life of faith. It is about being willing to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup>in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

So we shouldn’t

- Advise God, thinking that we know better.
- Criticise him, thinking that he made a mistake.
- Judge him, thinking that he is corrupt.
- Resent him, thinking that he is unloving.

But instead we should trust him because God knows more, understands more, discerns more and loves more.

This was the attitude of Jesus in his life, but also in his suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed for deliverance, but said, “Yet not my will, but yours be done.” Luke 22:42

And even though he called out from the cross in agony asking why his Father had forsaken him, as he died he prayed, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Luke 23:46

## b) Repentance

And if we have this attitude, it will change our lives, because: “To shun evil is understanding.” Job 28:28

If we have a deep reverence for God, then we will have a deep desire to repent, to turn away from anything that dishonours and profanes him. “To fear the Lord is to hate evil.” Proverbs 8:13

So wisdom is about reverence and repentance. And this is the call of the gospel. “Turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” Acts 20:21 If you’re here this morning, and you haven’t made that commitment yet, then my prayer is that you would make that decision today!

Of course, Job had made that commitment. God said about him that “He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” Job 2:3 And Job went on to describe some of the details of how he did this in the rest of his speech in chapters 29 to 31.

But in his intense suffering, he had struggled to keep doing this. He had battled with God’s will. Questioned his justice. Criticised God’s actions. But God was going to turn up and help Job to repent and get back to trusting in him.

## Conclusion

But we’ll need to leave that for next week.

This morning, I want us to remember the treasure of wisdom.

- That it is superior to all the other things people treasure. It’s crucial if we’re going to live a blessed life.
- But no matter how much we search for it, we’ll never find it in ourselves or in this world.
- Instead we need to go to Christ, because he is its source.
- And we need to trust in him, bowing before him as our Saviour and Lord, even when we can’t understand all that he is doing.

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