

Job 28

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[0 : 00] Job 28. Job 28. Job 28. Is there anything worse than unanswered questions?

! There's lots of things worse than unanswered questions. Suffering and loss. But very often, the kind of great traumas!

are bound up with not receiving answers to the questions. And so some of you go to bed at night with lots of questions and you wake up in the morning and there's still no answer.

So actually, think about everyday life. Where's my jumper mum? Have you seen my car keys? What's for tea? Can you get some more milk?

Questions and answer are the warp and woof of life. The texture of our daily interactions with each other. Try the silent treatment.

[1 : 05] Next time, you're asked, where's my keys? It doesn't go down well, does it? And that's just the car keys. Where is my child taken from me?

Why did this happen? Why did this happen? How have we reached this point? Why did he cheat on me? Why did he allow it to happen, God?

Where were you when? Where are you now? Why? Why? Why? The Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, didn't he? Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened to you. He says, therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in my name, you will receive it.

And it will be yours. But we do a lot of seeking without seeming to find the answer. Do you know what it's like to keep knocking only to feel that you can hear even more bolts being shut on the other side of the door?

[2 : 11] And far from the door being opened to you, it feels like the door is being closed to you. And so all of us here, I expect, know what it is to pray and feel like we've not received an answer.

And that's exactly where we are in the book of Job. Job 28. It jumps into one of Job's speeches. And we've dived in here because what is happening is that Job in effect presses pause.

Things have begun spiraling down for him. He's being ground down into the ground. Job and his friends, if you remember and if you know the book, they've gone round in circles and in circles.

They say to you, Job, you're suffering well because you've sinned. Job says, well actually I don't have unconfessed sin in my life and yet God seems to be treating me like a sinner and I can't understand why.

In chapter 19, there's a chink of light which begins to appear when Job realises actually I've got a redeemer, I've got a vindicator, I've got a champion who will declare me right on the last day.

[3 : 15] And here in chapter 28 is another beautiful ray of light because Job speaks a poem about wisdom. It's a poem about wisdom in praise of wisdom, in honour of wisdom.

And the Bible values wisdom in the same way that we tend today to value knowledge or wealth or happiness. We tend to think that if we get those things, degrees and pounds and pleasure, we will be okay.

It'll make our lives work. It'll make our homes happy and all will be well with the world. But the Bible tells you that they all come second to getting wisdom. Get wise first.

If you get wise, everything else will fall into place. And that's the message for this evening. We're going to tune into what the Bible says about wisdom because it's going to give us a surprising answer to the question of our sermon which is, why won't God answer me?

And I want to say the answer to that question of why won't God answer me is not the answer that you're hoping for. But it is a hopeful answer. So number one, a costly search for a valuable object.

[4 : 24] And then secondly, an impossible search for an unobtainable object. And then number three, a lengthy lesson in acceptable ignorance. Okay, number one, a costly search for a valuable

object. I don't know whether he picks it up but Job, he skillfully compares the search for wisdom, the search how to live wisely and well in the world and he compares it with the search for something else.

And here's what he says. He says, if this other kind of search is extremely costly, exceptionally difficult, then it's nothing compared to the search for wisdom.

Do you see what the comparison is here in verses 1 to 11? It's a search which is costly for a valuable object. What is it? It's the world of mining. Perhaps in the ancient world there was no form of kind of exploration that was more difficult than searching for gold or silver or iron or sapphire. Just while everything else could be done, human beings could explore upwards, do you remember the Tower of Babel? a construction with bricks and sand. Genesis 4 and 5, you've got the beginning of art and culture.

You've got kind of things being made. As you go through, there's all sorts of beautiful temples and palaces. Exploration could be done, couldn't it, horizontally.

[5 : 51] There were camels and horses and ships and maps. You could travel pretty much anywhere. But going down, down, down into the earth, well maybe today that's a bit like our space travel.

It was in a way the final frontier. So I don't know what's happened with kind of the space tourism and Richard Branson and all that. You know the kind of attitude, the attitude is we can get there. It can be done. But space tourism, it's a costly search for a valuable object. New kind of tourism. And in the ancient world, mining was like that.

There's only so far you can easily dig down without oil well drill heads or whatever they're called or modern machinery. And so look at the picture that Job gives you.

Look what he's doing with it. The mine is a mysterious place, verse 3. I don't know whether you've been down to a mine. One of the best places in Wales to go is Big Pit. If you've never been there, it's an old working mine.

[6 : 54] It's amazing. Free. Even to the English. And you can go down. It's magnificent. At one point, you go down there. The Welsh miners sometimes sing. They'll tell you about the little children who used to work in the mine.

At one point, they say, if you've been down there, can you turn your headlamp off? Can you turn your headlamp off and I've never felt darkness like it? You can't see your hand in front of your face like that.

And that's what the mine is like. Verse 3, it's black, it's dark, it's isolated, it's remote. Verse 4, it's isolated from human beings. You don't live down there. But in verse 7, it's also isolated from all forms of life.

No birds, no animals, just a single-handed assault of man on the toughest substance there is on earth, rock. If you know anything about mining, you'll know that it's back-braining, painful, sweat-inducing, costly work.

And it's all in search of treasure. Verse 10, valuable objects, precious things. And so Job 1-11 brilliantly draws us into the search.

[8 : 03] We love search and rescue stories, don't we? Children, you love to play hide-and-seek. Do you remember the plight of the miners in Chile? Do you remember that from all those years ago?

There's something about us that loves that kind of rescue story from mines. people trapped down beneath the ground. How can we find someone or something that's impossible to find?

So why has Job done this? Why the poetry? Because he's searching for wisdom. And he's looking for it with every fiber and sinew of his being. He's looking for answers and an explanation and the sense and the light and the reasons and the full account of, well, why is God doing what he's doing with it?

Why are you doing what you're doing, God? And how's the search going? What's the progress like? Well, number two. It's an impossible search for an unobtainable object.

Now look straight away at the negative forecast to the search. Verse 12. Man does not know its worth and it is not found in the land of the living.

[9 : 16] And he's going to explore this all the way down to verse 22. Let's get the answer very clear right away. The two questions there in verse 12.

Where shall wisdom be found? It can't. Where does wisdom, where is the place of understanding?

But we don't know. And we know verse 13 that it's valuable beyond words. And so you cannot put a price on wisdom.

Sell everything you have, put all the gold in all the world, in all the banks, in all the world, but you can't put a price on wisdom. But now look at the other canots in the passage.

Wisdom cannot be found among the living. Cannot be bought. Do you see what it's saying?

[10:18] If anything is worth pursuing, wisdom is. Forget your iron-sized super marathon journeys through mountains and valleys to win a medal or cash.

Forget space tourism. Forget all your untapped oil reserves under the oceans, Mr. BP and Shell. Having God answer why, why have you done this to me, that is worth more than the best that the world has got to offer.

It's worth more than all that there is in the world. And yet you cannot find the place where God keeps the answer to that question. Can you find where it comes from and where it lives?

You cannot. Look at verses 21 and 22. It is hidden from the eyes of all living and it's concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and death say we've heard a rumor of it with our ears.

Destruction and death. Here is Job saying that even if you go to the most extreme edges of the cosmos, you will not find it. Now the word for Abaddon is really the word for destruction.

[11:37] But there's a really interesting link that if you go to Revelation chapter 9, you discover that Abaddon is the name that is given to the angel who guards the abyss, the bottomless pit.

And so do you see what he's saying when you put Job 28 and Revelation 9 there? If you go there right to the farthest ends of the universe and meet the very angel God himself has put in charge of that department and you ask them why, he would shrug his shoulders and say I don't know.

And if you ask him where are the answers, where is wisdom, he would say this. Yes, that reminds me. I did once hear a rumor amongst the angels that wisdom exists somewhere.

Well, I can't remember anymore. I've got no idea where to find it. And Job knows that this is an impossible search for an unobtainable object.

So is the journey over? It's not. When you put into the sat nav and it says destination cannot be found, it's not the news that helps, is it?

[12:54] It doesn't help you when you put that into kind of Google Earth. Destination cannot be found. You know the kind of thing when the journey and the emotions are running high but the destination cannot be found.

That's a very different thing than being told the destination doesn't exist, isn't it? They're two different things. So you're on a journey, you put it in the sat nav and it says destination cannot be found.

Well, you don't think to yourself, oh, well, destination cannot exist. There's something to worry about, something to argue over. Why did we even set out in the first place if you didn't know where we were going?

But if the destination doesn't exist, well, it's devastating because the whole journey has been pointless. And destination cannot be found means that you need to change your tack, you need to change your equipment, you need to recalibrate where you're going.

Destination cannot be found, there is a destination, you've just not reached it yet. And that's what Job is saying in Job 28. It's what he hears from God and realizes himself as he looks at his worn-out body, wisdom, he says, cannot be found by me, but that doesn't mean that wisdom doesn't exist.

[14:17] And so here is where I am, Job says, in the third point, I've realized that I'm learning a lengthy lesson in acceptable ignorance. And so here is the beginning of a beautiful light.

And it's a beautiful light for Job and it's a beautiful light for you and me. Look at verse 23. God understands the way to it.

And he knows its place. Just like now, tonight, after the service is finished and you've got your coffee and tea, you will know the way home after the evening service, I hope.

You'll know it like the back of your hand, won't you? I hope you do. Sorry. You know the way to home.

You know where you live. You can plot it in your mind's eye, the beginning of the journey and the middle of the journey and the end of the journey. You can see it.

[15:21] Just as easily as God knows where the answers are to the biggest, deepest, hardest, most painful, most perplexing, most awful question in the universe.

He knows whereabouts in the universe the answer lies to everything. He knows. God has not lost the key to the room where wisdom is found. God has not forgotten the way for he views the ends of the earth and he sees everything under the heavens.

And that is truly amazing. It's truly wonderful. Proverbs 3, verse 19 says this, By wisdom, the Lord laid the earth's foundation. By understanding, he set the heavens in place.

So when you go to Ikea and you buy your units in Ikea and you open the box and get rid of the polystyrene, you have a set of instructions that you work from. And when you build anything in life, you work from plan.

You might have known what color you wanted your kitchen to be when you had your kitchen done. But when you had your kitchen done, I hope you weren't the one pouring the cement and laying the bricks in the foundations.

[16:37] Why is that? because the vast majority of you are not builders, you're not architects. you need somebody who knows how to draw a plan and how to work a plan. And Job in the whole Bible says that God was like that too, that when he built the universe, he worked from a plan.

When God built the universe, he worked from a set of instructions, only he didn't have to go through planning. He didn't have to submit a pre-planning application. No one sent God instructions in the flat pack.

The blueprint that God worked from was wisdom. And the instructions that he worked to were called understanding. And wisdom is God's knowledge of how the world needed to be, to work.

The way that it was meant to work. And he and he alone is the only one who's seen the plans. He's the only one who knows why there should be blue whales and great white sharks and termites and stag beetles and men and women and civilizations and empires and you and me and the pain in your heart right now.

Because God is the one who views everything God is the one who understands everything God is the one who knows everything and God is the one who plans everything. And he made it all and he did it with wisdom and with understanding.

[18:09] And he is the only one who knows why the things that break your heart were put into this world and we're allowed to do that. Can't you see me says Job?

You want answers to that? Can you hear how long my speeches have been? Can you see how hard I've looked for the answers to those questions? Let me tell you I've entered a maze and I'm hedged in all around and there's only one person.

There's only one person who's got a bird's eye view with a maze. Job gives a powerful illustration of this and he says look at the weather look at verse 25. when he gave to the wind its weight and he apportioned the waters by measure.

Just look what Job says there. It's amazing. He takes the most uncontrollable thing in the world the ecological system the elements the weather you see them all there wind, oceans, rain, thunderstorm.

Don't forget our ability to read those things is not the same as our ability to control them is there? I'm told that there's an app isn't there that can basically tell you and predict more or less the exact moment when it's going to start raining over your washing in the back garden.

[19:38] it's so accurate because we've got satellites that can predict hurricanes but we never ever control the weather. We are always always reading it and we're measuring it and we're responding to it and we're never sending it but look at what Job does he takes the things that are untamable to us and he ties them to verbs that are what you do with your vegetable patch in your garden you take it in hand God established the force of the wind and measured out the oceans it's amazing he stretches out the tape and he says oh that'll be the Pacific that'll do nicely he made a decree for the rain here's our instructions for today rain over there please not over there tomorrow and he takes the thunder and the lightning and the storm and the gale force winds and he just carves a little niche for it in the sky he works out a route for it and its duration it's such powerful imagery and yet look where Job is taking this look what he does with it in verse 27 and he saw it and declared it he established it and searched it out just like you tend your little tiny ecosystem in your garden

God creates the ecosystem in the universe with more ease less effort and just like God did and stands back and he looks at the weather that he's in control of so God stands and he looks back at all his wise plans for the world and he appraises them and he confirms them and he says they are good amazing and so this is the point I think in the book of Job where Job stands back and says to you and I I've reached the place where I realize that God knows what he's doing but God decides

the very wind outside whether it blows hard or soft on your way home tonight and so if that's the case do I really think that God doesn't know what he's doing with me God understands God alone knows and because God understands I don't need to and if he alone knows he alone then it's not a knowledge that he's going to let me in on anytime soon and that is a lengthy and painful and yet it is a beautiful perspective to learn

I'm told I don't know whether this I should check really but Cornelius van Till was a kind of great theologian at Westminster Seminary and supposedly he began every lecture when he went in on a chalkboard he would draw one massive circle in which he would write God and then he would draw underneath it a tiny little circle which said man and every time he did it he was saying to the students you as a tiny little circle can only understand a part of God you can't understand it fully and I think that's right I think that's really helpful biblically we don't know everything there is about God again and again we have to say to ourselves we don't know there's lots about God we don't know and so Job is saying I'm the tiny little circle God is the massive great circle and all I know about him is what he's revealed to me so I've got such a surprising ending in verse 20 in verse 20

Job does not say God knows where wisdom lives and he's going to lead me there open the door and say look here's all the answers here's all the answers to every question one day he will one day we will know but it's not what satisfies and encourages Job look at verse 28 he said to man behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom to turn away from evil is understanding and so Job turns away his search for the architecture to look at the architect and God does not take Job by the hand and lead him to the answers he takes Job by the hand and he leads him to his throne to his majesty and to his greatness and to his indescribable unfathomable power and he asks him bow before me and we ask well why doesn't God answer my questions because we think don't we knowledge is what we want we want things explained we want things reasoned we want new information and Job is saying maybe just maybe we are not even built to understand God's reasons and maybe we're not yet ready for them and maybe fearing God is more beneficial to us more crucial more important than understanding God acceptable ignorance comes when I realize

I am not God and I am the creature and he is the creator acceptable ignorance is fearing him the fear of the Lord is the affectionate reverence of the child who bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's law the fear of the Lord makes you wise because it teaches you to live on your knees the wise person knows what life looks like from knee height they know the knee height perspective of themselves and the world they are adults who never ever stopped being children why can't I have this mum why aren't I allowed to do this dad why can't I have more screen time sometimes the answers to those questions make no sense to a child do they but the parent is being perfectly wise and if we who are evil know how to parent like this what might God be doing with all our questions all our whys all our pain we don't know

[26 : 06] I don't know but we do know he does know