

Wisdom in Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] was punishing him for some sin he had committed and so he ought to repent. In other words, Job was reaping what he sowed as Eliphaz put it.

But they were wrong, weren't they? And so now they must repent of their lack of wisdom for they have not spoken of God what was right as Job did.

Now of course this may seem a little confusing because didn't Job just repent in verse 6? For overstepping the mark? That's what I suggested last week.

That's what the text seems to say. Yet God says twice here that Job has spoken right. So what's going on? Well throughout the book Job has maintained that God has caused his suffering for no reason on Job's behalf.

And that's actually right. In fact God even said this himself back in chapter 2. So on the next slide we read this from chapter 2. God is speaking and God says, There is no one on earth like Job.

[1 : 0 3] He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.

Now when it says without any reason, it's referring to without any sinful cause in Job. That is there is no sin in Job deserving of punishment.

That's what it's referring to because that's what the speeches have been all about. Finding a sinful cause or reason in Job's life that has caused God's punishment upon him.

You see the friends say God is punishing Job for some sinful reason in his life. Job is saying no, God is making him suffer for no such reason. And Job was right. God did cause Job's suffering for no such reason of sin in Job's life.

Now God had his own reasons, some of which I suggested back in our first talk. But Job was right to say that God had no reason or sinful cause in Job to punish Job like this.

[2 : 1 0] Job was right to say there was no such reason in his life to warrant such suffering. But the wisdom of the friends, as we saw, could not understand this. You see their wisdom, as we saw, said that we suffer because we deserve it.

But life is not always that neat or black and white, is it? Perhaps we suffer because we deserve it, but often we suffer even when we don't deserve it.

And Job even tried to point this out to them. And so their wisdom, you see, was lacking. It could not account for Job's situation or the situation of us when we suffer, but don't deserve it. And so now they must repent of their stubborn lack of wisdom while God vindicates Job as the one who spoke rightly.

Job, of course, as I said, did later repent for accusing God of injustice and demanding from God as though God owed an explanation to Job. But he was right to say all along that God caused his suffering for no sin in his life before that.

Now, at this stage, Job still has nothing to show for his life, does he? Until that is verse 10, where God not only vindicates Job, but restores Job.

[3 : 22] Have a look at verse number 10. We're up to point two. After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.

All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him.

And each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. And the Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 donkeys.

And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter was named Jemima, the second Keziah, and the third Keren Hapak. Now, where, sorry, nowhere in all the land where they found women as beautiful as Job's daughters.

And their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived 140 years. He saw his children and their children to the fourth generation.

[4 : 28] And so Job died an old man and full of years. It's a very happy ending, really, isn't it? And notice it's just not material blessings that God gives Job.

It's also restored relationships. A relationship with his family, verse 11, and everyone else who knew him. You see, true prosperity is not simply about material possessions, but right relationships.

And notice in verse 10, we're told God gives Job twice as much as he had before. So in chapter 1, we know he had 7,000 sheep. But here in chapter 42, he has 14,000 sheep and so on.

But notice here in chapter 42, Job is given only seven sons and three daughters, which is exactly the same amount he had back in chapter 1 at the start.

How is this twice as much as he had before? Well, I take it when he is in heaven, he will have twice as many. For these 10 kids will be united with the other 10 who died before.

[5 : 35] And so he will have twice as many. In other words, I think there's a subtle hint of resurrection here. What's more, Job got to see his children and his children's children down to the fourth generation.

And when he died, verse 17 says, he died an old man and full of years. It's a phrase that indicates a full and content life with God.

It's the phrase used of the great ones of the Old Testament like Abraham and David. And so Job has been restored in every sense, in his relationship with God, in his relationships with others, and in terms of earthly blessings.

In fact, it's more than a restoration. It's actually an exaltation. God exalts him in the eyes of everyone by giving him twice as much as he had before.

And they, in turn, bring gifts to him. However, there are still some unanswered questions, aren't there? Like, what happened to Elihu? You know, the young guy, the young upstart who thought he knew it all?

[6 : 37] He's not mentioned anywhere. And what about Satan? Is he put in his place? And why does God still not tell Job why he suffered? Plus, there are other questions the book does not give us specific answers to.

Like, why does God allow one person to suffer more than another person? And how do we know why we are suffering? Some friends of ours from Sydney have been trying to have children.

We've got a couple of friends who have been trying to have children, married couples, trying to have kids for, I think they're up to six years now. And they have sought to live a life for God, you know, led Bible study groups, served at church and so on.

They even spoke to me about IVF because they wanted to make sure they would do the right thing when it came to IVF. And so I said, I think life begins at fertilization. If you destroy any fertilized eggs, then you're destroying life.

And so under great pressure from their doctor, who wants to, you know, fertilize hundreds of eggs, you know, probability on your side, they said, no, we only want four fertilized.

[7 : 43] Now, this is a costly exercise. And they said, no, we only want four eggs fertilized because we believe that's life and we're prepared to have four children. So they went through that. Now, two eggs fertilized out of the four.

The other two didn't take. And so they didn't work, died. And then only one took inside the womb. So they're down to the last one. And then not too long ago, it was two months she was pregnant for, she miscarried and lost that one as well.

And they were devastated. So how am I, when they call me up, which they did, how am I supposed to answer them? What am I supposed to say to them when they ask why?

Well, this book of Job is known as a book of wisdom in the Bible. So what wisdom does it give us when we suffer? And it's here I want us to turn to chapter 28 because I think chapter 28 is the key chapter of the Bible.

I've mentioned this before. In fact, on the next slide, a simple structure of the book seems to suggest this. So as you're turning, you might like to glance up at the slide for a quick moment.

[8 : 51] So you've got the start of Job's suffering and then you've got three cycles of speeches. And then you've got this poem about wisdom, chapter 28. And then you've got another three speeches about Job's suffering.

And then you've got the end of Job's suffering. And the kind of format of it kind of forms a sandwich, if you like. And it makes chapter 28 stand out. So turn there with me now to chapter 28. It's on page 521.

There are other structures out there, but all commentators agree that chapter 28 is a key, if not the key, chapter of the book.

So you might remember there was three cycles of speeches, all from the French trying to give their own wisdom on Job's suffering. And then comes chapter 28, written by the narrator and reminding us, I think, about true wisdom.

So let's take a brief look at it. It breaks roughly into three sections. Verses 1 to 11, it speaks about mankind's ability to uncover hidden treasure.

[9 : 57] So have a look there at verse 1 for an example. Verse 1. There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined. From it is taken, iron is taken from the earth and copper is smelted from ore.

Mortals put an end to the darkness. They search out the farthest recesses. For all in the blackest darkness, far from human dwellings they cut a shaft.

In places untouched by human feet, far from other people they dangle and sway. The earth from which food comes is transformed below us by fire. A lapis lazuli, basically a blue sapphire, comes from its rocks and its dust contains nuggets of gold, it says, and then on it goes.

But do you see what it's saying? Humankind has been pretty good at finding all sorts of treasure. They can cut shafts, they can dig out deep, and they get all sorts of sapphires, gold, silver, and iron.

And then in verses 7 to 8, it talks about how no animal can do what people can do. And so verse 10 and 11 summarizes mankind's ability to find hidden treasure. So bottom of the page.

[11 : 10] People tunnel through the rock. Their eyes see all its treasures. They search the sources of the rivers and bring hidden things to light.

Do you see what it's saying so far? Mankind has a great ability to find hidden treasure. But for mankind's ability to find hidden treasure and bring it to light, there is one treasure we cannot find.

And that's wisdom. So turn over the page to verse 12. It says, See what it's saying there?

Humankind has been pretty good at finding all sorts of treasure, but we cannot unearth wisdom. And this is a problem because it's the most valuable treasure of all.

Have a look at verse 15 to see how valuable it is. It says, It cannot be bought with the finest gold. No matter how much gold you have, it's worth more than that. Nor can its price be weighed out in silver.

[12 : 24] It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, which is a very wealthy, I was going to say suburb, but town in Solomon's day. With precious onyx or the blue sapphires, neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold.

Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention next to it. The price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Kush cannot compare with it. It cannot be bought with pure gold.

Do you see what it's saying? Wisdom is the greatest treasure there is. Why? Well, because it tells us how to live. Now, I need to point out at this point, there is a difference between wisdom and intelligence.

My brother is, I'm ashamed to say, smarter than I am. He's younger, which kind of hurts. And so he kind of did better than me at the VCE. But until he was in his early 20s, I kid you not, early 20s, he used to think that he could cross the road without looking.

His logic was, if I just put my head down and run fast enough, the cars won't get me. But that's what he said to himself until the early 20s. Not wisdom, is it?

[13 : 47] It's not living well, is it? He's smarter than I am, you know, kicked my butt in the VCE. But there's a difference, you see, between wisdom and intelligence. He's a lot wiser now, by the way.

You see, you can have an IQ of 200, but you can still get hit by a car. Wisdom, you see, helps us to live well. And because of that, it is more valuable than all treasure.

But so far, this chapter has told us that we cannot find it. In fact, verses 20 to 22 tells us again. Have a look at verse 20. Where then does wisdom come from?

Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, it says. Concealed even from the birds in the sky. Destruction and death say, only a rumor of it has reached our ears.

See, no one can find wisdom. The greatest treasure of all, no one can find it. Except, of course, God. So verse 23. God understands the way to wisdom, and he alone knows where it dwells.

[14 : 55] For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he 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.

You see, in the end, only God knows how to find wisdom. And what does he say? He says, it is the fear of the Lord, that's true wisdom. And to shun evil is true understanding.

You see, if we want to be truly wise, if we want to live a truly well life, if you like, then we're to fear God and shun evil. That is, we're to have a reverent awe of God, which seeks to honour him and reject evil.

And if we do that, then we'll truly be wise. We'll have true understanding. And we'll live a full, content, wise life. You see, throughout the book, people have been asking, why?

[16 : 02] Why has Job suffered like he has? And over the last three weeks, I've tried to show you some reasons the Bible gives for suffering, which are on the screen. So, for example, we sometimes suffer because, well, we've sinned.

You speed down Doncaster Road and get caught by the police, you suffer a fine. Simple as that. Okay? But most of the time, we suffer because we live in a fallen world. And so there are natural disasters, human sinfulness, which affects us, including persecution.

But we've also seen that God will use this suffering to prove our faith genuine and, in fact, to grow our faith and make us more like Jesus.

And as we've looked at those reasons, we've also seen that we have a God who knows suffering himself in Christ and so can sympathise with us. We know we have a God who is sovereign and can help us.

We're seeing that we have a God who is loving and works in all things for our good. And we have a God who will not put up with suffering forever, but will send Jesus to return and end suffering and bring us to life where there is no suffering.

[17 : 17] They are the answers the Bible gives to this topic. But why does God allow one person to suffer more than another? Or why doesn't God tell Job why he suffered? The answer is, we just don't know.

Nor can we know. You see, chapter 28 is a key chapter because it reminds us of our limits to understanding. It reminds us that we can only know so much.

And I actually think this is a good thing because it reminds us that we're not God. Instead, it helps us to depend on him who is God, which is how we were created to live.

In other words, it helps us to be in a right relationship with God, fearing him and shunning evil. You see, sin is about trying to be God in our own life. But suffering reminds us that we are not God.

And so true wisdom in suffering is not always knowing why things happen. Rather, it's knowing God who knows why things happen.

[18 : 22] Because then we are living as we are created to live. Then we'll be living a truly wise life, you see. This is the lesson of chapter 28 and the whole book, in fact.

In the very first verse, we were introduced to Job, who was described as a man who feared God and shunned evil. Opening verse, he was wise. And he continued to be so, even in the face of suffering.

Then after seven days, he began to grieve, which is right and appropriate. Then his friends tried to give their wisdom as to why he was suffering. And then Job started to accuse God of injustice and demand God give him an answer.

The relationship, you see, was beginning to be reversed as Job demanded from God. He was almost replicating the Garden of Eden. But then as we saw last week, God spoke and reminded Job that there are limits to human wisdom and understanding.

He reminded Job that he is God and Job is not. And Job saw that true wisdom was not to always know why, but to fear and trust the God who knows why.

[19 : 30] That's the picture of Job we get at the end of the book, is it not? A man who is no longer demanding of God, but instead one who continues to fear God and shun evil. And that's what makes this ending of Job truly happy, you see.

For behind the final verse is a great note of contentment, even though Job never finds out why God made him suffer. Yet he was still able to die, it says, old and full of years.

Content. Why? Because he realised that he didn't need to know why he suffered. Instead he knew God who knew why, and that was enough. Well, what about us?

How are we to live, especially when we suffer, which is our final point, point four. Well, I take it we're to be wise like Job, even in suffering. And as we've seen, wisdom is not always knowing why we suffer, but it's knowing God who knows why.

And in particular, it's knowing Jesus. For we read in Colossians, on the next slide, the other reading that we had, Paul writes this to the Colossians, that wisdom is found in Christ.

[20 : 35] He prays that they may reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

You see, the Colossian Christians, they were being told that they needed a special extra wisdom. And Paul says, no, no, if you've got Christ, you've got everything.

You've got true wisdom. And so wisdom is not about having all the answers in life to why we suffer. It's about knowing Jesus, who gives us life to the full.

A life of meaning now, with God as our loving and sovereign heavenly father, who is always working for our good and will bring us into inheritance, which will far outweigh any present suffering.

I want to end by looking at a verse from Paul. It's from Romans chapter eight. It's on the slide. Paul writes this incredible statement. He says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[21 : 44] Now, we need to be clear here. Paul is not making light of his suffering. He knew severe suffering. Rather, he's highlighting just how glorious the next life will be.

He's saying the glory to come will be so amazing that even our worst sufferings will be worth it. That will seem like we had to endure nothing compared to the glory that we will receive.

One of the best things I loved about university was not the course, but the three-month holiday at the end. I love that about uni. Of course, to get to the three-month holiday at the end, you had to work hard and study and do the exams, all of which were painful at the time.

But once you were there enjoying your three-month break, I thought, totally worth it. I looked back at the work and the study and the exams and thought, is that all I had to do to get this three-month break?

Now, you might be thinking, I did an easy course. You had to do it harder. But that's kind of what Paul is saying here, you see. Paul is saying that here, our glory will be so great that when we look back and see what we had to endure to get there, we'll think, is that all?

[22 : 56] That was nothing compared to this glory that God has given me. Totally worth it. That's what Paul is saying here. And if our suffering is great now, as Paul's was, then that ought to tell us something about how much greater our glory will be.

You see, for Paul, knowing God through Jesus is infinitely better than not suffering. For Paul, knowing God through Jesus is infinitely wiser than always knowing why we suffer.

For Paul, knowing Jesus and the glory to come later is infinitely better than having a comfortable and secure life now. For he knows that by knowing Jesus, he's prepared for his future.

A future where Jesus will vindicate all who trust in him, as God vindicated Job who trusted in him. A future where God will also exalt us who believe in Jesus.

For we will reign with Christ. We will inherit the earth, says Jesus. A future so glorious that it will make even our worst sufferings seem as nothing compared to it.

[24 : 01] But all this is for us who know Jesus, who is wisdom. And so can I ask, do you know Jesus? Do you trust in him?

Know Jesus? Know glory? Know Jesus up here and know wisdom now? And unimaginable glory later. For us who do know Jesus, who do trust in him, then are we continuing to trust in him?

Even groan for the life to come. That's how Paul continues in Romans chapter 8. A groaning that we might be clothed with our heavenly bodies. And not complain.

Some people read that verse and say we're to complain. And we do that far too easily. No, no, it's a longing. It's an inward longing for that day when there will be no more suffering. And we're to remember that true wisdom is not about knowing all the reasons why.

Rather, it's about knowing God who knows why. Our friends who were trying to have children and then miscarried. I remember talking to the husband on the phone a little while after it happened.

[25 : 07] And still not really knowing what to say. I had no wisdom to offer him. No answers to give, but to point him to Jesus.

But then he said this. He says, well, I don't know why, but God does. That's what he said. I guess we just have to keep trusting him.

You see, although he didn't understand why, knowing the God who knows why, that was enough for him. In fact, because he knows Jesus, he even commented that at least he'll get to see his miscarried unborn child in heaven.

You see, here is a wise guy. A guy living well, despite not knowing why they were suffering. For instead of being consumed by grief, he continued to fear God who will bring him, and most likely his child, to glory.

And so that's the kind of example we are to follow. Example of this friend of mine. Example of Job. The example of Christ. Let's pray that we would.

[26 : 11] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this book of Job. We thank you that it does remind us that we are not you, but that you alone are God.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to continue to trust you, to continue to fear you and shun evil, for that is true wisdom.

And when we are suffering, Father, we pray most of all that you would help us in those times, to cling to Christ, who is wisdom for us.

Christ, who feared you and shunned evil as the perfect example, knowing that he will bring us to unimaginable glory later. So, Father, we pray that you would help us in this, for Christ's sake.

Amen. I believe we're going to sing again. It's all right.