

I wonder which of the modern inventions you appreciate most? Is it the car, is it advances in medical science, the ipod, the mobile phone?

I would think that for many of us it is the world wide web and the ease with which we can access it and the information that is so easily available to us.

I want you for a moment to imagine 20 or so men sitting round chatting and then someone asks “what is another word for a belvedere or an outdoor structure sited to take advantage of a view”?

Well suddenly two modern inventions went into overdrive, the mobile phone and Google as we tried to find out the answers to the crossword. That is the great thing about Google isn't it – you can type in almost anything and find an answer. The answer to that question by the way was gazebo.

The web is like a mine of information and we love that because it is not just children who constantly ask questions but adults as well.

Well for such Google is wonderful because it offers lots of answers to almost any question.

We do want to find things out and we do want to understand why.

As we have been looking at the book of Job over these weeks the big question that Job and his friends have been struggling with is why. Why was Job suffering as he was.

The three friends, without reference to Google, had been sure it was because he had done wrong. He was being punished by God for sin. Job was equally sure that was not the case. We know that the friends had got it wrong because we have heard the words from God in Job 1:8, “Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”” Job was not suffering because he had done wrong.

So we have spent a few weeks asking the question why was he suffering? The answer is important because it may help me to understand why I am suffering or why my friend or family member is suffering. However we haven't been too successful so far and neither were the friends in their conversation with Job and in a sense the arguments back and forth peter out at the end of chap 27 with no conclusion reached.

Chapter 28, which we look at today, is very different. What has been going on has been a search for understanding but none has been found. What we have in this chapter is a poem about wisdom, about true understanding. From here we will go on through further attempts at understanding, to the final section where God finally speaks.

As we read this poem, we are not sure who is speaking is it Job or a narrator but it is the word of God and it speaks to us.

The poem moves us in a different direction, away from finding a specific answer to Job's question of why he was suffering and towards God.

1. The human search for valuables v1-11.

We have spoken of Google being a mine of valuable information here we are reminded of the way humans search for things of value. In v1 we have the mining of silver and gold. It is only humans who do this as we see, vs 7 & 8, falcons don't nor lions. But man will tunnel deep despite the problems and danger in order to extract that which is of value. We have seen recently how the deep search for valuable things is dangerous with the failure of the oil well in the gulf of Mexico and the resultant damage.

The speaker draws us into this search for things of value as a parallel to the search that Job and his friends have been on for an understanding of his plight, their search for wisdom.

2. Where can wisdom be found v12-22?

The thread in these verses is comparable to that in vs1-11 in that wisdom is valuable but hard to find. It is often inaccessible.

V13&14 it is not found on land or in the sea

V15-19 it can't be bought not even with the most valuable item.

V20-22 it is hidden and all we have is a rumour as to its existence and where it might be. How incredibly frustrating for Job and for all of us to come this far and just have a rumour as to where wisdom can be.

Do you know anything of Oak Island? It is an island off Nova Scotia and the location of the so-called Money Pit where underground passages and structures have supposedly been excavated extensively since 1795 in the belief that one or more pirate captains had stashed large amounts of loot there. No treasure has ever been found.

The search for wisdom, even with Google, can be just as frustrating and we can almost imagine Job with these words coming back full circle to where he began no wiser than at the start when his wealth, family and health were taken from him.

3. God alone is wise v23-27

We are not told where wisdom is to be found we are simply directed to God who does know. In that we are reminded of how little we know. We are told how God established the force of the wind, a decree for the rain and a path for the storm and it reminds us how we cannot even today forecast the weather let alone control it. God alone, v23, knows and there is no indication here that God will tell us humans where we can find wisdom as such. However we are in all this clearly pointed back to God.

4. Wisdom is found in God v28

Job wanted an answer to a question “why am I suffering”. As such wisdom was seen as an object in itself. However, here, and through the rest of the book, wisdom is seen as being located in God and in him alone. In this Job is seen as being wise because as we saw from 1:8 he was a man who “fears God and shuns evil”. So he was already doing the right thing, though he may not have realised it. God here is in effect saying don't seek wisdom but come to him.

A couple of quotes I have found helpful about this verse.

Firstly from Christopher Ash in 'Out of the Storm' “we ought not to expect to find Wisdom (to know the answers to our questions) but rather to bow in humble worship before the one who does and therefore to turn from evil.”

The secondly from Bryson Smith, “Job 28 emphasises 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.”

So the application is clear, away with Google and other search engines for in them does not lie wisdom – just the answers to crosswords! Instead we need to come to God in fear and turning away from evil.

So what does it mean to fear the Lord? Isn't that Old Testament?

The clear word of God in both Old and New Testaments is that fear of God is an aspect of our relationship with God but it is one that is probably underplayed today.

In Acts 9:31 we read how the early church "grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" and in Phil 2:12 the Christians were encouraged to, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

Now we need to understand what the Bible means by the fear of the Lord.

Put simply the fear of the Lord is having a right reverence and respect for God, holding him in awe for who he is and for what he can do. It is getting God in his right place as it affects our lives.

It is this fear which brings wisdom

Let me suggest quickly a couple of things from this v28.

The clear statement is that the fear of the Lord is wisdom. As we can see from 42:8 the three friends have not spoken wisdom, "My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

The fear of the Lord is wisdom and the second part of the verse explains that in saying that wisdom leads to turning away from evil.

So the first thing is that the fear of the Lord brings wisdom which leads us away from evil and to God.

If we want an example from the New Testament of this being worked out we can turn to Acts 19 where Paul was in Ephesus preaching and healing many. Seven sons of Sceva a Jewish priest mimicked what Paul was doing until a man with an evil spirit turned on them and beat them. The effect of this was that "they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds."

What we see here is people, aware of the power and holiness of God, turning from their sin in confession and repentance.

In our own day we are aware that for many people there is no such turning to God and the reason for that as Paul says in Romans 3:18 is that "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

This week there has been some press coverage of attempts by the Government to strengthen the hand of teachers in schools to deal with difficult pupils. Nick Gibb, the schools minister said, "'poorly-behaved children" were detecting "weakness" in teachers and disrupting classrooms to the detriment of other pupils' education". The youngsters sense a weakness in the teachers or in the structure of authority. There is no respect, no fear of any reprisals and so they behave badly. They don't learn and they stop others learning. In a sense put themselves outside the learning situation and cause others to be affected.

That is magnified in our society where God is left out. People have no awareness of God, or respect or reverence for him and so they put themselves outside of God and his kingdom and that has a detrimental effect on those inside, who do seek to follow Jesus. We see that not only with people like Richard Dawkins but just in the general godlessness in our media which can so easily hamper our faith.

It is the fear of the Lord, his judgement and power, his goodness and love which brings his wisdom and turns us from evil to walk God's way.

So how is that in your life? Is there a fear of the Lord a right respect for God as God, a sense of reverence and awe because he is a Holy and awesome God majestic in power and might? It is when we don't have that right sense of fear of the Lord that complacency creeps into our lives and we begin to accept and excuse sin, being sure that God won't mind and, without saying it, thinking that he won't do anything about it. As the writer to the Hebrews reminded his Christian readers, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). I am not trying to frighten us here but to set before us this Biblical truth of the fear of the Lord which is wisdom that leads us away from evil and towards God.

The second thing is that the fear of the Lord grows in us through the word of God. In Deut 31:10-13 Moses commanded the people that every seven years when they came together the book of the Law was to be read to the people "so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God".

It is as we meet together and the word is read and heard and as we allow that word to mould and shape our lives that the Fear of God grows in us and that fear produces his wisdom which combats the many other voices we hear in the world around us. The siren voices of the world will deny God and godliness but God's word will point us to Jesus who, "who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." (1 Cor 1:30)

So let me encourage us to continue to meet together round the word of God, to continue to listen to God's voice that we may grow in the fear of the Lord which is wisdom that leads us to shun evil and live God's life. Stifle that siren voice which says it doesn't matter if you read the Bible or if you come to church instead let God speak so that you may grow in the Fear of the Lord and in his wisdom.

This chapter of Job turns us away from the sterile and inconclusive arguments that had been raging between Job and his friends. It shows us that wisdom, while valuable and desirable, is not easily gained. It doesn't come via Google. It doesn't drop out of the sky, nor is it dug up from the ground. Indeed it is illusive. But at the end the chapter we see where wisdom is found and it is in God and that the fear of the Lord is wisdom. The chapter teaches us that we can through God's word grow in the fear of the Lord in that true respect and reverential awe of God where by we do turn away from all that would displease him and seek to live lives that please, honour and glorify our God.