

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
The Book of Job
November 4, 2020
Job's Final Defense - Job 29-31

Like many of his other prayers, Job's plea for a mediator, an advocate and a redeemer seems to fall on deaf ears. No one takes up his case and he is left to defend himself. His final speeches come in Job 27-28 and then in chapters 29 -31. To borrow terms from the theatre, these are soliloquies. Job turns his attention from his friends and addresses the audience. His first topic is wisdom, where it is found and where it is not found.

Summing Up - Part 1 - Job 27-28

Chapter 27 begins with Job swearing an oath concerning his innocence. "As God lives ..." is one of several verbal formulas in the Old Testament whereby a person makes a vow. In 27:5 Job intensifies the oath by using another oath formula "Far be it from me ..." Job is vigorously defending his righteousness, holding fast to his innocence and testifying to a clear conscience.

After vowing his innocence, Job calls upon God to judge his enemies (v. 7 ff). His ultimate enemy is Satan, but his nearer enemies are his friends who have heaped up accusations against him. Job's prayer is similar to some of what we read in the book of Psalms, especially the "imprecatory psalms" where God is called upon to judge and punish the enemies of the psalmist. It's easy to get a bit squeamish about these sorts of prayers. However, it is important to remember that these are not wanton calls to violence, and that the real focus of these prayers is ultimately not upon the individual who is at odds with the one praying, but the primal evil that opposes God.

Chapter 28 is one of the great poetic sections of the entire Old Testament, not just the book of Job. It is a meditation on wisdom – where it is found and where it is not found. Job has called out to God for an answer to why this is happening to him, but the only answer he has received so far is from his friends who simply say that Job is a great sinner and deserving of his sufferings.

The poem begins by inviting us to tour around and marvel at the wonders of a human mining operation. At great peril, people hunt for things of great value. But wisdom is not found in the land of the living (v 13) and even if one were to venture to the depths of the sea the search is fruitless. (v. 15) Wisdom cannot be purchased with gold, silver, pearls or any other thing. To our finite, human eyes wisdom is hidden.

In the end, true wisdom is found in one place alone – in God.

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.
²⁸ And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.'"

Job's conclusion fits nicely with other Old Testament reflections on wisdom.

- Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."
- Proverbs 8: 22-36 -- These verses have traditionally been understood as a messianic prophecy, proclaiming the work of the Second Person of the Trinity in the creation of the world. In the opening verses of John's Gospel Christ's work in creation will be highlighted and later in 1 Corinthians and Colossians Paul will speak of Christ being the wisdom of God.

Not only is Job 28 a wonderful poem about wisdom, it also prophecies about the true wisdom that is found in God and that ultimately comes in Christ alone.

- 1 Corinthians 1:18-35 "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

- Colossians 2:2-4 ² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

This first summary speech ends on a strong note. Job has forcefully argued his case and made an impassioned appeal for wisdom. However, his confidence does not last long. Like anyone enduring hard times, Job is up one moment and down the next. His second speech will sound more like a lament with a final appeal for someone to hear and answer him.

Summing Up - Part 2 - Job 29-31

Job's final words are like that of a lawyer stating the final argument in case. He appeals to the jury – the readers – stating his innocence, his suffering and finally calling out to God for an answer.

Job 29 – The Longing

In the first chapter of his final argument, Job looks back over his life and recounts the blessings he had before his world was turned upside down. He uses a classical pattern to his speech that begins with a recounting of his blessings

Job 29:1-6 – Blessings “my path was drenched with cream.”

Job 29:7-10 – Honour “young men saw me and stepped aside”

Job 29:11-17 – Benevolence – “I rescued the poor, made the widow’s heart sing, was eyes to the blind, a father to the needy, broke the fangs of the wicked”

Job 29: 18-20 – Blessing “I will die in my own house, my days as numerous as the grains of sand”

Job 29:21:25 – Honour – “Men listened to me expectantly”

Was Job really this good?

Job 30 – The Lament

“But now they mock me” (v. 1)

“they do not hesitate to spit in my face” (v. 10)

“And now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me” (v. 16)

“I have become a brother of jackals, a companion of owls” (v. 29)

Job 31 – The Last Word

A Job 31:1-3 Covenant Made

B Job 31:4-6 God sees my ways; let him judge

C Job 31:7-34 Job’s innocence

B Job 31:35-37 Oh that someone would hear me, let the Almighty Answer

A Job 31:38-40 Let the land witness I have not broken the covenant

“The Words of Job are ended.”

Enter Elihu - Job 32-37

Job is ready to hear from God, but before the Lord speaks, he has to endure one last appeal from those who have come to be with him. A young man named Elihu has obviously been listening to what Job has to say in his defence and to what Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have been saying to Job. Interpreters have struggled to know exactly what the purpose of these speeches are as Elihu does not add a whole lot of new material to the discussion. Some see him as a puffed up religious gasbag, almost a bit of comic relief as he presumes to know much more than his elders. Others put a kinder construction on his involvement suggesting he is naively attempting to be Job's advocate.

Here is a quick summary of his contribution to the conversation:

Job 32:6 – 33:7 – “I need to get this off my chest”

Job 33:8-33 – “A person may be chastened by God, but a mediator might convince that person to repent and be saved from going down to the pit.”

Job 34:1-37 – In two sections Elihu focuses on the justice of God

Job 35:1-16 – Human actions have no effect on God and God is not influenced by the arguments of Job

Job 36:1-21 – If we serve and obey God there is prosperity; if we do not listen we perish by the sword.

Job 36:22- 37:24 As a storm gathers, Elihu prepares us for the coming of the Lord