

TEXT: Ps. 111; * Job 28.1-18; Proverbs 1.1-7;

DATE: February 3rd , 2002

SERMON TITLE: Lesson From an Out House.

CHILDREN'S SERMON:

Job 28:1-28

1 "Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold to be refined. 2 Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. 3 Miners put an end to darkness, and search out to the farthest bound the ore in gloom and deep darkness. 4 They open shafts in a valley away from human habitation; they are forgotten by travelers, they sway suspended, remote from people. 5 As for the earth, out of it comes bread; but underneath it is turned up as by fire. 6 Its stones are the place of sapphires, and its dust contains gold. 7 "That path no bird of prey knows, and the falcon's eye has not seen it. 8 The proud wild animals have not trodden it; the lion has not passed over it. 9 "They put their hand to the flinty rock, and overturn mountains by the roots. 10 They cut out channels in the rocks, and their eyes see every precious thing. 11 The sources of the rivers they probe; hidden things they bring to light. 12 "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? 13 Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living. 14 The deep says, 'It is not in me,' and the sea says, 'It is not with me.' 15 It cannot be gotten for gold, and silver cannot be weighed out as its price. 16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. 17 Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. 18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls. 19 The chrysolite of Ethiopia cannot compare with it, nor can it be valued in pure gold. 20 "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? 21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. 22 Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.' 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 out the waters by measure; 26 when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt; 27 then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. 28 And he said to humankind, 'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' " 1

Proverbs 1:7

7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. 2

Psalms 111:10

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever. 3

Introduction;

1The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

2The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

3The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

It was –32 degrees Celsius at our house last Monday morning. Everything changes after –30 Celsius; the snow squeaks when you walk across the yard, the truck seat feels like an icy train rail, the door slams like it knows no rubber, the motor groans in sheer pain, and the power steering howls in protest. The tires squeal as you roar off in a huge screen of smoke that would do James Bond proud. ‘Dadburnit, it started,’ you think to yourself as the tires clunk down the road in Flintstone like fashion. ‘If it wouldn’t have started I could have gone back to bed. Oh but its cold!’

It’s not really that cold at –32 degrees Celsius. Why that’s only about 22 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. I mind the time when I was a kid and we used to walk barefoot through the snow for ten miles to go to school when it was 42 below ... all up hill. Of course I exaggerate, but actually we did go to school at 42 below and even colder. I attended a one-room schoolhouse that was heated by an old cast iron coal and wood stove. When it got down to better than 40 below that old school house was so cold we spent most of the day, ten kids in seven grades, crowded around the stove while the teacher read stories to us. Occasionally one of us would have to leave the comfort of stove cuddling to make an arctic expedition to the outhouse. It was because of one such voyage that I created my most vivid memory of subzero weather and earned a place for myself in the fool’s hall of fame.

Boredom was what drove me to the outhouse more than actually having to make a deposit. I suppose that is why I paused and spent a good period of time surveying the landscape before entering the clapboard one-holer.

Locked in frost and dazzling sunlight, the landscape was a joy to behold.

It's splendor caused me to slip into a nice daydream as I surveyed, and it was in the midst of survey and daydream that I subconsciously noticed the outhouse metal latch-handle.

It was right at the same height as the nose on my seven-year-old head, which is the reason I suppose that it seemed quite natural for me to plant my nose onto it.

Seven-year-old noses being what they are in winter - always wet - mine instantly froze to the metal latch as though it had been welded there.

The pain was impressive as I tried in vane to back out of my predicament and it caused me to begin to wail like a banshee for help.

No one heard.

I howled louder adding a few expletives that I had learned from my Dad.

Cussing at the top of my lungs necessitated the flailing of my tongue, which also ended up getting instantly frozen to the metal door-latch.

Fear quickly ran her course and my bladder decided to get involved in the adventure.

I stood there howling my head off and freezing to death.

I never dreamed death could be so miserable, and I would have died for sure if the teacher, who was quite well informed as to my capacity for daydreaming myself into serious trouble had not gotten a little suspicious due to the length of my leave and mounted a search party.

There I was; 40 degrees below zero with an ugly old clapboard outhouse welded to my tongue and both legs turning into yellow Popsicles.

From birth wisdom had been rather elusive to me.

It's not that I was born dumb; my seven-year-old self just seemed to lack wisdom and sound judgment.

As a kid, I didn't mind this lack of wisdom much for it spawned some pretty good adventures. My family prayed I would quickly outgrow this condition or better yet, learn some wisdom at school. Grade school was unproductive as far as planting any wisdom in me, what with outhouses and such. High school seemed to make my lack of wisdom even more pronounced, adding girls and cars to the stew. Too many years in college and university yielded little in terms of wisdom. I just learned how to make real intelligent bad decisions. In fact, when wisdom did begin to arrive in my life to any appreciable degree, I was about thirty years of age. Oddly enough, it was around the same time that I came to faith in God and I never really associated the two until the other day.

II. The Texts

The other day I ran into some Wisdom Literature in the Bible. I was reading the book of Job and not enjoying it very much (how do you read Job and enjoy it – I always do it as a matter of discipline, like eating my peas) when I got to the 28th Chapter.

Most biblical scholars agree that the 28th Chapter is an interlude in the argument between Job and his friends, one which does not clearly say who is speaking nor who is addressed. They say it is a little confusing as to why it is even there at all for it seems to interrupt the flow of the book.

Not being a biblical scholar, I disagree.

In my opinion, God inspired it, it is addressed to all of us readers of the book, and its purpose is to give us a little break from the tiresome cast of Job and his friends, who have gone on adnauseam in their arguments.

Perhaps the purpose is to hold wisdom up so that we can clearly see that neither Job nor his so-called friends have any.

Whatever the case, the point of Job Chapter 28 seems very clear.

One can find precious stones that are deep in the earth but one cannot find wisdom on their own.

One can have all the valuable things of the earth but one cannot buy wisdom.

One can be the smartest of all of God's creatures and yet one cannot know where wisdom can be found or learned.

Wisdom resides solely with God and only God has ... *established it, and searched it out. And he (God) said to humankind, 'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'* (Job 28.28)⁴.

It's not just the book of Job that makes this point.

The book of Psalms says: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.* (Psalm 111.10)⁵.

And the book of Proverbs says: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* (Proverbs 1.7).⁶

"The fear of the Lord" is not what we tend to think.

From the Bible's perspective, at least in the Old Testament, "the fear of the Lord" is used as a designation of true piety and faith.

It is a fear conjoined with awe, love and hope, and is therefore not a slavish dread, but rather filial reverence with regards to God.

"Fear of the Lord" describes a personal faith relationship with God.

And from the Bible's perspective this is where wisdom is found.

The Bible is not talking about just some religious kind of wisdom detached from the world.

⁴The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

⁵The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

⁶The New Revised Standard Version, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified and speaks: “*I, Wisdom, live together with good judgment. I know where to discover knowledge and discernment. (Proverbs 8.12)*”⁷

Biblical wisdom is both religious and practical.

Stemming from “the fear of the Lord” ... or a personal faith relationship with God ... it branches out to touch all of life, as the extended commentary on wisdom in Proverbs indicates.

“Wisdom takes insights gleaned from the knowledge of God’s ways and applies them in the daily walk.

This combination of insight and obedience (and all insight must issue in obedience) relates wisdom to the prophetic emphasis on the knowledge of God (knowledge of God equals cordial love and obedience for the Prophets).”⁸

All of this is to say that faith in God has got to address more than just belief.

It issues forth in how one relates to the world.

One’s life in the world is strongly influenced by faith in God.

The more dedicated and committed that faith is the more influence it has.

When one is totally committed to God in Christ one is compelled to live all of life for Christ.

This means every decision made becomes one made to mirror what Christ would have me do or perhaps what Christ would do.

Hence a person of dedicated faith seeks that every decision, every word spoken, even every thought that issues forth would reflect the decision making, speech and thinking of his master.

How much wiser in the world could one be than that ... to be as Christ in the world.

⁷*Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1996.

⁸*The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

Much of ancient Celtic Christian piety sought the kind of faith in Christ that issued forth in being and thinking as Christ would do in the world.

Their ancient prayers written in Gaelic reek with requests made to God for just this.

We sang one this morning ... translated from the ancient Gaelic ... and attributed to St. Patrick.

#82 ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE attributed to St. Patrick

1. Christ be beside me, Christ be before me,
Christ be behind me, King of my heart,
Christ be within me, Christ be below me,
Christ be above me, never to part.

2. Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left hand,
Christ all around me, shield in the strife.
Christ in my sleeping, Christ in my sitting,
Christ in my rising, light of my life.

3. Christ be in all hearts thinking about me,
Christ be on all tongues telling of me.
Christ be the vision in eyes that see me,
In ears that hear me, Christ ever be.

translation c:1969 James Quinn
C.C.L.I. #710966

I have noticed that since coming to Faith in God I have not frozen my tongue to a single outhouse.

I jest ... but my point is that in my own experience, as I grow in my faith and knowledge of God, a real practical wisdom has begun to develop in my life.

As Christ gets a hold of more and more of my life, I seem to reflect him more and more in my thinking and decision making.

It is not so much what I think God is telling me to do any more, it is more what "Christ would do" that drives my life.

There is a big difference, and I think that is what maturing in the faith and knowledge of God is all about.

Oh I know I got a long ways to go, but at least I know where to go,
or better put, to whom to go, to find wisdom.
And, that's a lesson well learned.

III. Conclusion

To conclude I would like to share a reading from John Bunyan's
Pilgrim's Progress.

It is from the Tenth Stage and is part of Christian's dialogue with
ignorance.

THE TENTH STAGE.

Then Christian addressed himself thus to his fellow:

CHR. *Well, come, my good Hopeful, I perceive that thou and I must
walk by ourselves again.*

So I saw in my dream, that they went on apace before, and Ignorance
he came hobbling after. Then said Christian to his companion, *I much
pity this poor man: it will certainly go ill with him at last.*

HOPE. *Alas! there are abundance in our town in his condition, whole
families, yea, whole streets, and that of pilgrims too; and if there be so
many in our parts, how many, think you, must there be in the place
where he was born?*

CHR. *Indeed, the word saith, "He hath blinded their eyes, lest they
should see," etc.*

*But, now we are by ourselves, what do you think of such men? Have
they at no time, think you, convictions of sin, and so, consequently, fears
that their state is dangerous?*

HOPE. *Nay, do you answer that question yourself, for you are the
elder man.*

CHR. *Then I say, sometimes (as I think) they may; but they being
naturally ignorant, understand not that such convictions tend to their
good; and therefore they do desperately seek to stifle them, and
presumptuously continue to flatter themselves in the way of their own
hearts.*

HOPE. *I do believe, as you say, that fear tends much to men's good, and to make them right at their beginning to go on pilgrimage.*

CHR. *Without all doubt it doth, if it be right; for so says the word, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10.*

HOPE. *How will you describe right fear?*

CHR. *True or right fear is discovered by three things:*

- 1. By its rise; it is caused by saving convictions for sin.*
- 2. It driveth the soul to lay fast hold of Christ for salvation.*
- 3. It begetteth and continueth in the soul a great reverence of God, his word, and ways; keeping it tender, and making it afraid to turn from them, to the right hand or to the left, to any thing that may dishonor God, break its peace, grieve the Spirit, or cause the enemy to speak reproachfully.*

HOPE. *Well said; I believe you have said the truth..⁹*

⁹Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ().