

CHAPTER 28

The strain of this chapter is very unlike the rest of this book. Job forgets his sores, and all his sorrows, and talks like a philosopher or a virtuoso. Here is a great deal both of natural and moral philosophy in this discourse; but the question is, How does it come in here? Doubtless it was not merely for an amusement, or diversion from the controversy; though, if it had been only so, perhaps it would not have been much amiss. When disputes grow hot, better lose the question than lose our temper. But this is pertinent and to the business in hand. Job and his friends had been discoursing about the dispensations of Providence towards the wicked and the righteous. Job had shown that some wicked men live and die in prosperity, while others are presently and openly arrested by the judgments of God. But, if any ask the reason why some are punished in this world and not others, they must be told it is a question that cannot be answered. The knowledge of the reasons of state in God's government of the world is kept from us, and we must neither pretend to it nor reach after it. Zophar had wished that God would show Job the “secrets of wisdom” (³¹¹⁶Job 11:6). No, says Job, “secret things belong not to us, but things revealed,” ³¹²⁹Deuteronomy 29:29. And here he shows,

I. Concerning worldly wealth, how industriously that is sought for and pursued by the children of men, what pains they take, what contrivances they have, and what hazards they run to get it (v. 1-11).

II. Concerning wisdom (v. 12). In general, the price of it is very great; it is of inestimable value (v. 15-19). The place of it is very secret (v. 14, 20, 22). In particular, there is a wisdom which is hidden in God (v. 23-27) and there is a wisdom which is revealed to the children of men (v. 28). Our enquiries into the former must be checked, into the latter quickened, for that is it which is our concern.

EXTENT OF HUMAN DISCOVERIES

Here Job shows,

1. What a great way the wit of man may go in diving into the depths of nature and seizing the riches of it, what a great deal of knowledge and wealth men may, by their ingenious and industrious searches, make themselves masters of. But does it therefore follow that men may, by their wit, comprehend the reasons why some wicked people prosper and others are punished, why some good people prosper and others are afflicted? No, by no means. The caverns of the earth may be discovered, but not the counsels of heaven.

2. What a great deal of care and pains worldly men take to get riches. He had observed concerning the wicked man (^{<3276>}Job 27:16) that he *heaped up silver as the dust*; now here he shows whence that silver came which he was so fond of and how it was obtained, to show what little reason wicked rich men have to be proud of their wealth and pomp. Observe here,

I. The wealth of this world is hidden in the earth. Thence the silver and the gold, which afterwards they refine, are fetched, v. 1. There they lay mixed with a great deal of dirt and dross, like a worthless thing, of no more account than common earth; and abundance of them will so lie neglected, till the earth and all the works therein shall be burnt up. Holy Mr. Herbert, in his poem called *Avarice*, takes notice of this, to shame men out of the love of money: —

*Money, thou bane of bliss, thou source of woe,
Whence com'st thou, that thou art so fresh and fine?
I know thy parentage is base and low;
Man found thee poor and dirty in a mine.*

*Surely thou didst so little contribute
To this great kingdom which thou now hast got
That he was fain, when thou wast destitute,
To dig thee out of thy dark cave and grot.*

*Man calleth thee his wealth, who made thee rich,
And while he digs out thee falls in the ditch.*

Iron and brass, less costly but more serviceable metals, are *taken out of the earth* (v. 2), and are there found in great abundance, which abates their price indeed, but is a great kindness to man, who could much better be without gold than without iron. Nay, *out of the earth comes bread*, that is, bread-corn, the necessary support of life, v. 5. Thence man's maintenance is fetched, to remind him of his own original; he is of the earth, and is hastening to the earth. *Under it is turned up as it were fire*, precious stones, that sparkle as fire — brimstone, that is apt to take fire — coal, that is proper to feed fire. As we have our food, so we have our fuel, out of the earth. There the sapphires and other gems are, and thence gold-dust is digged up; v. 6. The wisdom of the Creator has placed these things,

1. Out of our sight, to teach us not to set our eyes upon them, ^{<1375>}Proverbs 23:5.

2. Under our feet, to teach us not to lay them in our bosoms, nor to set our hearts upon them, but to trample upon them with a holy contempt. See how full the *earth is of God's riches* (^{<1342>}Psalm 104:24) and infer thence, not only how great a God he is *whose the earth is and the fulness thereof* (^{<1341>}Psalm 24:1), but how full heaven must needs be of God's riches, which is the city of the great King, in comparison with which this earth is a poor country.

II. The wealth that is hidden in the earth cannot be obtained but with a great deal of difficulty.

1. It is hard to be found out: there is but here and there *a vein for the silver*, v. 1. The precious stones, though bright themselves, yet, because buried in obscurity and out of sight, are called *stones of darkness and the shadow of death*. Men may search long before they light on them.

2. When found out it is hard to be fetched out. Men's wits must be set on work to contrive ways and means to get this hidden treasure into their hands. They must with their lamps *set an end to darkness*; and if one expedient miscarry, one method fail, they must try another, till they have *searched out all perfection*, and turned every stone to effect it, v. 3. They must grapple with subterraneous waters (v. 4, 10, 11), and force their way through rocks which are, as it were, the roots of the mountains, v. 9. Now God has made the getting of gold, and silver, and precious stones, so difficult,

(1.) For the exciting and engaging of industry. *Dii laboribus omnia vendunt* — *Labour is the price which the gods affix to all things.* If valuable things were too easily obtained men would never learn to take pains. But the difficulty of gaining the riches of this earth may suggest to us what violence the kingdom of heaven suffers.

(2.) For the checking and restraining of pomp and luxury. What is for necessity is had with a little labour from the surface of the earth; but what is for ornament must be dug with a great deal of pains out of the bowels of it. To be fed is cheap, but to be fine is chargeable.

III. Though the subterraneous wealth is thus hard to obtain, yet men will have it. He that loves silver is not satisfied with silver, and yet is not satisfied without it; but those that have much must needs have more. See here,

1. What inventions men have to get this wealth. They *search out all perfection*, v. 3. They have arts and engines to dry up the waters, and carry them off, when they break in upon them in their mines and threaten to drown the work, v. 4. They have pumps, and pipes, and canals, to clear their way, and, obstacles being removed, they tread *the path which no fowl knoweth* (v. 7, 8), unseen by the vulture's eye, which is piercing and quick-sighted, and untrodden by the lion's whelps, which traverse all the paths of the wilderness.

2. What pains men take, and what vast charge they are at, to get this wealth. They work their way through the rocks and undermine the mountains, v. 10.

3. What hazards they run. Those that dig in the mines have their lives in their hands; for they are obliged to *bind the floods from overflowing* (v. 11), and are continually in danger of being suffocated by damps or crushed or buried alive by the fall of the earth upon them. See how foolish man adds to his own burden. He is sentenced to eat bread in the sweat of his face; but, as if that were not enough, he will get gold and silver at the peril of his life, though the more is gotten the less valuable it is. In Solomon's time silver was as stones. But,

4. Observe what it is that carries men through all this toil and peril: *Their eye sees every precious thing*, v. 10. Silver and gold are precious things with them, and they have them in their eye in all these pursuits. They

fancy they see them glittering before their faces, and, in the prospect of laying hold of them, they make nothing of all these difficulties; for they make something of their toil at last: *That which is hidden bringeth he forth to light*, v. 11. What was hidden under ground is laid upon the bank; the metal that was hidden in the ore is refined from its dross and brought forth pure out of the furnace; and then he thinks his pains well bestowed. Go to the miners then, thou sluggard in religion; consider their ways, and be wise. Let their courage, diligence, and constancy in seeking the wealth that perisheth shame us out of slothfulness and faint-heartedness in labouring for the true riches. *How much better is it to get wisdom than gold!* How much easier and safer! Yet gold is sought for, but grace neglected. Will the hopes of *precious things* out of the earth (so they call them, though really they are paltry and perishing) be such a spur to industry, and shall not the certain prospect of truly precious things in heaven be much more so?

✠ JOB 28:12-19

THE EXCELLENCY OF WISDOM

Job, having spoken of the wealth of the world, which men put such a value upon and take so much pains for, here comes to speak of another more valuable jewel, and that is, *wisdom and understanding*, the knowing and enjoying of God and ourselves. Those that found out all those ways and means to enrich themselves thought themselves very wise; but Job will not own theirs to be wisdom. He supposes them to gain their point, and to bring to light what they sought for (v. 11), and yet asks, “*Where is wisdom?* for it is not here.” This their way is their folly. We must therefore seek it somewhere else, and it will be found nowhere but in the principles and practices of religion. There is more true knowledge, satisfaction, and happiness, in sound divinity, which shows us the way to the joys of heaven, than in natural philosophy or mathematics, which help us to find a way into the bowels of the earth. Two things cannot be found out concerning this wisdom: —

I. The price of it, for that is inestimable; its worth is infinitely more than all the riches in this world: *Man knows not the price thereof* (v. 13), that is,

1. Few put a due value upon it. Men know not the worth of it, its innate excellency, their need of it, and of what unspeakable advantage it will be to them; and therefore, though they have many a price in their hand to get this wisdom, yet they *have no heart to it*, ^{<176>}Proverbs 17:16. The cock in the fable knew not the value of the precious stone he found in the dunghill, and therefore would rather have lighted on a barley-corn. Men know not the worth of grace, and therefore will take no pains to get it.

2. None can possibly give a valuable consideration for it, with all the wealth this world can furnish them with. This Job enlarges upon v. 15, etc., where he makes an inventory of the *bona notabilia* — *the most valuable treasures* of this world. Gold is five times mentioned; silver comes in also; and then several precious stones, the onyx and sapphire, pearls and rubies, and the topaz of Ethiopia. These are the things that are highest prized in the world's markets: but if a man would give, not only these, heaps of these, but all the substance of his house, all he is worth in the world, for wisdom, it would utterly be contemned. These may give a man some advantage in seeking wisdom, as they did to Solomon, but there is no purchasing wisdom with these. It is a gift of *the Holy Ghost*, which *cannot be bought with money*, ^{<180>}Acts 8:20. As it does not run in the blood, and so come to us by descent, so it cannot be got for money, nor does it come to us by purchase. Spiritual gifts are conferred without money and without price, because no money can be a price for them. Wisdom is likewise a more valuable gift to him that has it, makes him richer and happier, than gold or precious stones. It is *better to get wisdom than gold*. Gold is another's, wisdom our own; gold is for the body and time, wisdom for the soul and eternity. Let that which is most precious in God's account be so in ours. See ^{<184>}Proverbs 3:14, etc.

II. The place of it, for that is undiscoverable. *Where shall wisdom be found?* v. 12. He asks this,

1. As one that truly desired to find it. This is a question we should all put. While the most of men are asking, “Where shall money be found?” we should ask, *Where may wisdom be found?* that we may seek it and find it, not vain philosophy, or carnal policy, but true religion; for that is the only true wisdom, that is it which best improves our faculties and best secures our spiritual and eternal welfare. This is that which we should cry after and dig for, ^{<188>}Proverbs 2:3, 4.

2. As one that utterly despaired of finding it any where but in God, and any way but by divine revelation: *It is not found in this land of the living*, v.

13. We cannot attain to a right understanding of God and his will, of ourselves and our duty and interest, by reading any books or men, but by reading God's book and the men of God. Such is the degeneracy of human nature that there is no true wisdom to be found with any but those who are born again, and who, through grace, partake of the divine nature. As for others, even the most ingenious and industrious, they can tell us no tidings of this lost wisdom.

(1.) Ask the miners, and by them *the depth will say, It is not in me*, v. 14. Those who dig into the bowels of the earth, to rifle the treasures there, cannot in these dark recesses find this rare jewel, nor with all their art make themselves masters of it.

(2.) Ask the mariners, and by them *the sea will say, It is not in me*. It can never be got either by trading on the waters or diving into them, can never be *sucked from the abundance of the seas or the treasures hidden in the sand*. Where there is a vein for the silver there is no vein for wisdom, none for grace. Men can more easily break through the difficulties they meet with in getting worldly wealth than through those they meet with in getting heavenly wisdom, and they will take more pains to learn how to live in this world than how to live for ever in a better world. So blind and foolish has man become that it is in vain to ask him, *Where is the place of wisdom*, and which is the road that leads to it?

⌘ JOB 28:20-28

THE WISDOM REVEALED TO MAN

The question which Job had asked (v. 12) he asks again here; for it is too worthy, too weighty, to be let fall, until we speed in the enquiry. Concerning this we must seek till we find, till we get some satisfactory account of it. By a diligent prosecution of this enquiry he brings it, at length, to this issue, that there is a twofold wisdom, one *hidden in God*, which is secret and *belongs not to us*, the other made known by him and revealed to man, which *belongs to us and to our children*.

I. The knowledge of God's secret will, the will of his providence, is out of our reach, and what God has reserved to himself. *It belongs to the Lord our God.* To know the particulars of what God will do hereafter, and the reasons of what he is doing now, is the knowledge Job first speaks of.

1. This knowledge is hidden from us. It is high, we cannot attain unto it (v. 21, 22): *It is hid from the eyes of all living*, even of philosophers, politicians, and saints; it is *kept close from the fowls of the air*; though they fly high and in the open firmament of heaven, though they seem somewhat nearer that upper world where the source of this wisdom is, though their eyes behold afar off (^{<389>}Job 39:29), yet they cannot penetrate into the counsels of God. No, man is *wiser than the fowls of heaven*, and yet comes short of this wisdom. Even those who, in their speculations, soar highest, and think themselves, like the fowls of the air, above the heads of other people, yet cannot pretend to this knowledge. Job and his friends had been arguing about the methods and reasons of the dispensations of Providence in the government of the world. "What fools are we" (says Job) "to fight in the dark thus, to dispute about that which we do not understand!" The line and plummet of human reason can never fathom the abyss of the divine counsels. Who can undertake to give the rationale of Providence, or account for the maxims, measure, and methods of God's government, those *arcana imperii* — *cabinet counsels* of divine wisdom? Let us then be content not to know the future events of the Providence until time discover them (^{<400>}Acts 1:7) and not to know the secret reasons of Providence until eternity discover them. God is now a God that hideth himself (^{<255>}Isaiah 45:15); *clouds and darkness are round about him*. Though this wisdom be hidden from all living, yet *destruction and death say, We have heard the fame of it*. Though they cannot give an account of themselves (for there is *no wisdom, nor device, nor knowledge at all in the grave*, much less this), yet there is a world on the other side death and the grave, on which those dark regions border, and to which we must pass through them, and there we shall see clearly what we are now in the dark about. "Have a little patience," says Death to the inquisitive soul: "I will fetch thee shortly to a place where even this wisdom will be found." When *the mystery of God shall be finished* it will be laid open, and we shall know as we are known; when the veil of flesh is rent, and the interposing clouds are scattered, we shall know what God does, though we know not now, ^{<800>}John 13:7.

2. This knowledge is hidden in God, as the apostle speaks, ⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾Ephesians 3:9. *Known unto God are all his works*, though they are not known to us, ⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾Acts 15:18. There are good reasons for what he does, though we cannot assign them (v. 23): *God understands the way thereof*. Men sometimes do they know not what, but God never does. Men do what they did not design to do; new occurrences put them upon new counsels, and oblige them to take new measures. But God does all according to the purpose which he purposed in himself, and which he never alters. Men sometimes do that which they cannot give a good reason for, but in every will of God there is a counsel: he knows both what he does and why he does it, the whole series of events and the order and place of every occurrence. This knowledge he has in perfection, but keeps to himself. Two reasons are here given why God must needs understand his own way, and he only: —

(1.) Because all events are now directed by an all-seeing and almighty Providence, v. 24, 25. He that governs the world is,

[1.] Omniscient; *for he looks to the ends of the earth*, both in place and time; distant ages, distant regions, are under his view. We do not understand our own way, much less can we understand God's way, because we are short-sighted. How little do we know of what is doing in the world, much less of what will be done? But *the eyes of the Lord are in every place*; nay, they *run to and fro through the earth*. Nothing is, or can be, hidden from him; and therefore the reasons why some wicked people prosper remarkably and others are remarkably punished in this world, which are secret to us, are known to him. One day's events, and one man's affairs, have such a reference to, and such a dependence upon, another's, that he only to whom all events and all affairs are naked and open, and who sees the whole at one entire and certain view, is a competent Judge of every part.

[2.] He is omnipotent. He can do every thing, and is very exact in all he does. For proof of this Job mentions the winds and waters, v. 25. What is lighter than the wind? Yet God hath ways of poisoning it. He knows how *to make the weight for the winds*, which he *brings out of his treasures* (⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾Psalm 135:7), keeping a very particular account of what he draws out, as men do of what they pay out of their treasures, not at random, as men bring out their trash. Nothing sensible is to us more unaccountable than the wind. We *hear the sound of it, yet cannot tell whence it comes, nor whither it goes*; but God gives it out by weight, wisely ordering both from

what point it shall blow and with what strength. The waters of the sea, and the rain-waters, he both weighs and measures, allotting the proportion of every tide and every shower. A great and constant communication there is between clouds and seas, the waters above the firmament and those under it. Vapours go up, rains come down, air is condensed into water, water rarefied into air; but the great God keeps an exact account of all the stock with which this trade is carried on for the public benefit and sees that none of it be lost. Now if, in these things, Providence be so exact, much more in dispensing frowns and favours, rewards and punishments, to the children of men, according to the rules of equity.

(2.) Because all events were from eternity designed and determined by an infallible prescience and immutable decree, v. 26, 27. When he settled the course of nature he foreordained all the operations of his government.

[1.] He settled the course of nature. Job mentions particularly *a decree for the rain* and *a way for the thunder and lightening*. The general manner and method, and the particular uses and tendencies, of these strange performances, both their causes and their effects, were appointed by the divine purpose; hence God is said to *prepare lightnings for the rain*, ^{<187>}Psalm 135:7; ^{<203>}Jeremiah 10:13.

[2.] When he did that he laid all the measures of his providence, and drew an exact scheme of the whole work from first to last. Then, from eternity, did he see in himself, and declare to himself, the plan of his proceedings. Then he prepared it, fixed it, and established it, set every thing in readiness for all his works, so that, when any thing was to be done, nothing was to seek, nor could any thing unforeseen occur, to put it either out of its method or out of its time; for all was ordered as exactly as if he had studied it and searched it out, so that, whatever he does, *nothing can be put to it nor taken from it*, and therefore *it shall be for ever*, ^{<204>}Ecclesiastes 3:14. Some make Job to speak of wisdom here as a person, and translate it, *Then he saw her and showed her*, etc., and then it is parallel with that of Solomon concerning the essential wisdom of the Father, the eternal Word, ^{<202>}Proverbs 8:22, etc. *Before the earth was, then was I by him*, ^{<301>}John 1:1, 2.

II. The knowledge of God's revealed will, the will of his precept, and this is within our reach; it is level to our capacity, and will do us good (v. 28): *Unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom*. Let it not

be said that when God concealed his counsels from man, and forbade him that tree of knowledge, it was because he grudged him any thing that would contribute to his real bliss and satisfaction; no, he let him know as much as he was concerned to know in order to his duty and happiness; he shall be entrusted with as much of his sovereign mind as is needful and fit for a subject, but he must not think himself fit to be a privy-counsellor. He said to *Adam* (so some), to the first man, in the day in which he was created; he told him plainly it was not for him to amuse himself with over-curious searches into the mysteries of creation, nor to pretend to solve all the phenomena of nature; he would find it neither possible nor profitable to do so. No less wisdom (says archbishop Tillotson) than that which made the world can thoroughly understand the philosophy of it. But let him look upon this as his wisdom, to fear the Lord and to depart from evil; let him learn that, and he is learned enough; let this knowledge serve his turn. When God forbade man the tree of knowledge he allowed him the tree of life, and this is that tree, ^{<308>}Proverbs 3:18. We cannot attain true wisdom but by divine revelation. *The Lord giveth wisdom*, ^{<306>}Proverbs 2:6. Now the matter of that is not found in the secrets of nature or providence, but in the rules for our own practice. Unto man he said, not, “Go up to heaven, to fetch happiness thence;” or, “Go down to the deep, to draw it up thence.” No, *the word is nigh thee*, ^{<314>}Deuteronomy 30:14. *He hath shown thee, O man!* not what is great, but *what is good*, not what the Lord thy God designs to do with thee, but what he *requires of thee*, ^{<308>}Micah 6:8. *Unto you, O men! I call*, ^{<304>}Proverbs 8:4. Lord, what is man that he should be thus minded, thus visited! Behold, mark, take notice of this; he that has ears let him hear what the God of heaven says to the children of men: *The fear of the Lord, that is the wisdom*. Here is,

1. The description of true religion, pure religion, and undefiled; it is to *fear the Lord and depart from evil*, which agrees with God's character of Job, ^{<300>}Job 1:1. The *fear of the Lord* is the spring and summary of all religion. There is a slavish fear of God, springing from hard thoughts of him, which is contrary to religion, ^{<424>}Matthew 25:24. There is a selfish fear of God springing from dreadful thoughts of him, which may be a good step towards religion, ^{<405>}Acts 9:5. But there is a filial fear of God, springing from great and high thoughts of him, which is the life and soul of all religion. And, wherever this reigns in the heart, it will appear by a constant care to *depart from evil*, ^{<306>}Proverbs 16:6. This is essential to

religion. We must first cease to do evil, or we shall never learn to do well.
Virtus est vitium fugere — Even in our flight from vice some virtue lies.

2. The commendation of religion: it is *wisdom* and *understanding*. To be truly religious is to be truly wise. As the wisdom of God appears in the institution of religion, so the wisdom of man appears in the institution of religion, so the wisdom of man appears in the practice and observance of it. It is understanding, for it is the best knowledge of truth; it is wisdom, for it is the best management of our affairs. Nothing more surely guides our way and gains our end than being religious.