



# FAITH IN THE STORM

THE BOOK  
OF JOB

## THE SMARTEST OF OUTLOOKS

The book of Job is a bit like a burger: the contents of the first half are paralleled in the second half, with the meat being in the centre (what's called a 'chiastic structure', from the Greek X of *chi*). Think of it as the 'McJob quarter-pounder':

The slices of bun: prologue; epilogue.

The relish: Job's prayer; God's answer.

The cheese: Job's friends; Elihu's speech.

And then there's the burger, the meat in this not-so-happy meal: Job's speech. It comes in 2 halves: portrait of a wise person (chs26-28); and portrait of a godly person (chs29-31). This morning we're going to look at that first half:

### **Job 26:5-14; 27:7-23; 28**

OK, Job has spent the past 23 chapters (!) arguing with his friends about the reason for his suffering. They think he's committed some kind of sin. He thinks they're idiots. And then he does what a lot of us do when things get tough: he swings from negative to positive. And he proceeds to school them on what true wisdom looks like:

**1) Wisdom recognises the power of God** (26:5-14). What kind of power? The power to create an entire cosmos! Now today we might talk

about the cause of the Big Bang, the creation of countless galaxies, or the formation of the solar system. But Job, he uses a bit of Middle Eastern mythology to get his point across:

- God spreads out 'the north' or *Tzaphon*. *Tzaphon* was also the name for Jebel Aqra in Syria – the Phoenician heavenly mountain. So "He creates heaven."
- He wraps up the waters in His clouds. An ancient way of saying, "God has created the earth's hydrology – evaporation, condensation, precipitation."
- He marks out the horizon as a line between light and darkness. Again, a way of saying, "He spins the earth on its axis and makes a sunrise every day."
- He cut *Rachav* into bits. *Rachav* was a sea monster from Phoenician mythology, and a symbol of the sea. So God divided the sea by making? Land!

And this is just the edge of His works! And after 4000 years of scientific discovery ... we know how true that is.

So, God is powerful enough to create the universe – and rule over it. To heal disease. To change situations. To answer prayer. Because He owns it (1 Chronicles 29:11).

A wise person will recognise that. But then there's this:

**2) Wisdom recognises the mystery of God (27:7-23).** Job refers to the speeches of his friends as 'meaningless talk' or *hevel*, vapour, mist, something with no substance, no staying power. And then he gives some more thoughts, about the fate of the wicked. Now on first hearing, Job doesn't sound that different to his friends – evil people get what they deserve, no matter how wealthy or influential they may be. But earlier on, Job claimed that evil people get away with murder. What is going on here?

Job, I think, is mimicking his friends, by describing his experience as *they* see it. Look at what he refers to:

- The loss of children (vs14).
- The loss of health (vs15).
- The loss of income (vs16-17).
- The loss of home (vs18-19).
- The loss of stability (vs20-21).
- The loss of position (vs22-23).

I.e. he's saying, "Innocent people suffer, too." But what's the point? That God can be paradoxical, sometimes. That's why God can be 1 mind and yet 3. Why God can interact with time and yet be unaffected by it. Why God can be sovereign and yet allow for our free-will choices. And why God can be all-powerful and all-loving and yet create a world where suffering exists.

God's ways and thoughts are beyond ours (Isaiah 55:9). And that calls for faith on our part. Patience too. And wisdom.

**3) Wisdom recognises the wisdom of God (28)!** Job wraps up the first half of his speech with a song – a song which is very typical of the wisdom books of the Bible, because it's a song dedicated to: wisdom.

In this song, Job describes how people 'dig deep' for precious stones and metals – both a dangerous and difficult way to make a living. But wisdom, he says, is even harder to find. And more precious. And this raises the question: where then can we find it? And Job lists a handful of places you won't:

- In the depths of the earth or the sea.
- In the marketplace (no, not even on e-Bay).
- In the animal kingdom (not even amongst the high-flyers!).
- In the grave (destruction and death).

Some of which might sound a bit weird, until you realise that all of these things were in some way worshipped in the ancient world. I.e. there's no wisdom in idolatry! So, where can we find it? The answer, Job says, is in the God who made all this. Because God is able to see all things, know all things, do all things. He is wisdom personified.

All of which leads Job to this conclusion (one that gets repeated an infinitum from Psalm 111 – Ecclesiastes 12):

*"The fear / reverence of the Lord – that is wisdom,  
And to shun evil is understanding."*

I.e. if we're going to even begin to understand suffering, we need to understand God, first. *That's* wisdom.

### **Choose Wisdom**

So, Job is saying, to his friends and us, "I don't know why this is happening. But I do know easy answers don't work." Instead, we need to believe that God is in charge; trust that He knows what He's doing (even when it doesn't seem to make sense); and choose to honour Him in how we deal with *our* suffering, and someone else's.

Human beings, we want to understand everything. Partly because we've been hardwired to be inquisitive, but also this: if I can understand how or why something happens, I might just be able to solve it. Or control it. To be God in this situation or that.

Suffering is God's way of saying, "Humanity, you may be clever, but you're not God." (Only Jesus could ever claim that!)

And speaking personally, I am a better person – and the world is a better place – when I remember that.