

Spiritual Minecraft

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Emma. Good morning, everyone. Really good to have you with us, whether you're in person or online. Are you a survivor or a creator?

Will your world be one where every achievement is hard won and you're struggling against lots of forces that are beyond your control? Or will there be one where you can sort away uninhibited and be as creative and inventive as you want and really express yourself?

That might sound like the start of a rather bad motivational talk, but I suspect some of you have recognised it's the choice you have to make in Minecraft. Minecraft is the most popular online game in the world, I believe, played by millions and millions of people.

And you build your own world or realm and interact with it. And you have a choice to make at the beginning. Are you going to be in survival mode or are you going to be in creative mode?

If you're in survival mode, you start with nothing. You start by punching trees to get some wood and build a shelter and some basic tools. And you're constantly on the lookout for adverse forces, mobs and so on that could derail you.

[1 : 18] If you're in creative mode, on the other hand, you can fly, you've got unlimited resources, you're invincible, and you can build and create to your heart's content.

It's a great game in both forms, particularly if you've got a grandson who can do all the hard work for you. And perhaps it has some elements of realism in it.

I think one of the things we've learned as we've gone through Job, and which will be evident against this morning, is that we're all in survival mode.

That life is tough and there are lots of things that are beyond our control. And sometimes we do look around and say, well, why is this happening?

Why do I have to put up with all these things? But we also learn, particularly from chapter 28 and subsequent chapters in Job, but we've seen it already, that there is a creator.

[2 : 17] That there is someone who has that power and that freedom. And for us to make the most of life, we need to have a relationship with the creator.

And that's very much what we're going to learn from chapter 28 today. Life is hard, but if we know God, if we have a relationship with him, we can begin to have wisdom and understanding in it.

Now I'm sure you've noticed if you've been to previous services like this, that chapter 28 is very different from any other in Job. So I think it's worth just taking a couple of minutes to look at the context and to orientate ourselves.

Now what I'm going to show you is very simplistic, but I think it might be helpful in helping us to see how the book of Job is structured. So I'd like the book of Job.

It is, as has been said in previous weeks, it's mostly poetry, but at the beginning and at the end, there are narrative sections. And I've called them the prologue and the epilogue.

[3 : 25] So the prologue is about Job's downfall from being wealthy and having a really good life to ending up in the gutter, all his possessions and family gone and his health gone as well.

And then at the end of the book, Job is restored to his former greatness and he is fully vindicated. In between, there are two main sections, which I've called dialogues and monologues.

So what we've looked at mostly in the book of Job so far is the dialogues. Job has three so-called friends. We've met two of them, Eliphaz and Bildad.

There's another called Zophar. And these three friends, the sum total of their contribution to the book of Job is to reiterate again and again that Job must be suffering because of some secret sin in his life.

He is being punished by God because if you suffer, it must be because you've done something wrong. And Job is reiterating again and again, No, I haven't got any secret sin in my life.

[4 : 33] I'm a man of integrity. I don't understand why this is happening. It's a conflict of kind of theoretical head knowledge and practical experience.

And there are three rounds of dialogues with the friends and it gets more and more fractious and people are just digging their heels. And some insights from Job, which we've looked at in previous weeks, but basically these friends are saying, Job is being punished for your sin.

And Job says, No, that can't be right. What we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks is a slightly different one. It's a series of monologues. First by Job, then by an angry young man called Elihu, and finally by God himself who responds to everything that's happened.

And the key question has really moved on. It's not, is Job being punished for sin? It's why is Job suffering, even though he's not a worse sinner than other people?

Elihu has many of the faults of the others whom Job interacts with, but he has the helpful insight that suffering can have a purpose beyond punishment. That God can use suffering for our good.

[5 : 51] And of course, we learn a lot of that in the New Testament, and Graham will be talking to us about it next week. And then at the end, God comes in, and he basically says to Job, Who are you to question me?

But at the end, he vindicates Job, and he condemns his friends. So we have these two main sections, dialogues and monologues.

And then we have chapter 28, which is what we're looking at today, which I've said is about the pursuit of wisdom. Now what are we to make of it? It doesn't talk explicitly about suffering.

It's about wisdom. How does it fit in with the book? Well, not everyone agrees on this, but I think that the most straightforward way to look at this chapter is to think of it as being a commentary by the narrator of the book of Job, rather than the words of Job himself.

It's very different from where Job is at this point, in his mindset and in his understanding. And I think it's best viewed as the writer of the book preparing us for the next section of monologues that's to come, and particularly preparing us for what God has to say a few chapters down the line.

[7 : 12] In other words, he's saying to us, let's take our eyes away from the gutter where Job is, and we've got this silly argument going on about whether Job's a bad sinner or not. Let's lift our eyes to God and recognize his greatness, and let's prepare for the overwhelming response that God will give in a few chapters to Job.

So it's a kind of positioning chapter in the book. If you're familiar with Hebrew poetry, you know that quite often the core of a poem is in the middle. That's where the core truth is shown, and then the rest expands on it.

Something similar, I think, happening here. But what about the chapter itself? I think the best way to orientate through chapter 28 is through two key verses, which are verse 12 and verse 20.

They look the same, but they're not quite the same. So in the first 11 verses, verses 1 to 11, we've got what I've called the search for wealth.

This thing about mining for iron and gold and copper and so on, we'll come back to that. But it is saying to us that human beings put a lot of effort into getting things that they consider valuable.

[8 : 31] And then you have verse 12. And in verse 12, the key question is, where can wisdom be found? Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

You can dig into the earth, and you know that at some stage you'll get minerals and rocks and gold and silver and so on. People know where they are.

But where can we go to find wisdom? That is the question that Job is about to address. So the next few verses are not the search for wealth, they're the search for wisdom.

Where can we find it? And a reiteration of just how much more valuable wisdom is than wealth. And then we have verse 20.

And verse 20 says to us, where does wisdom come from? So it's slightly different. It looks at first as just a repetition of verse 12, but it's not. Verse 12 says, where can wisdom be found?

[9 : 30] So go out and look for it. Verse 20 says, where does wisdom come from? And then the rest of the chapter is telling us that. It is talking about the source of wisdom.

And of course, the source of wisdom is God himself. And it goes up to the words of the Lord at the end. The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. And to shun evil is understanding.

So that I think is a simple way of looking at this chapter. It moves from the search for wealth to the search for wisdom, and from the search of wisdom to the source of wisdom, and ends up with God himself as where we find true wisdom.

Let's just take a few minutes to go into a little bit more detail. This is a difficult and deep chapter. We're only going to scrape the surface this morning. But let's just dig a little bit into it. So in the first 11 verses, we have this mining analogy.

Let's go back to Minecraft for a second. If you're in survival mode in Minecraft, you can achieve a certain amount above ground. You can cut down trees and build things.

[10:37] You can grow crops. You can kill animals for food. But you're quite limited. The real treasure, and this is why the name is Minecraft, the real treasure is when you dig underground, and you find these rocks and precious stones and so on below the dirt that's on the surface.

Here's my big tip if you ever play Minecraft. If you dig down, don't dig straight, because you just end up in a hole you can't get out of. That's the voice of experience for you.

But it's actually not irrelevant to this chapter. Because the first few verses actually are saying, men do wonderful things to get things from the ground.

They don't just dig down and look around hopelessly. We're looking at very, very old technology here. But we are looking at people who are clever and inventive. And the writer in this chapter isn't saying, humans don't have intelligence, or they're not ingenious.

He's saying, actually, they are clever, but they're still not always wise. We can maybe identify with that. We have a world where all sorts of wonderful things that the writer here couldn't possibly have imagined have been done and created, and yet we've messed up our climate.

[11:52] We're very clever. We're not necessarily wise. So the writer in talking about people being clever, he talks about them swinging on ropes around beneath the ground.

He talks about them using fire. Not sure whether that fire is for light or possibly to kind of get access into the more precious metals and so on. He talks about following the course of rivers.

It's possible that means they actually divert rivers, sometimes for their own ends, to help them to get to things better. People are clever when they put their mind to it.

But actually, the key message of these verses is that if we think something is really valuable, we will go to an awful lot of effort to achieve it.

And what the writer is saying here is, look at how much effort people go to to get gold and silver and precious stones and so on. They go into the furthest recesses of the earth.

[12:52] They go into the blackest darkness. They go where no self-respecting animal or bird would even think of going and deprive themselves of all sorts of things just to find these physical treasures.

And that's still true, isn't it? We're not really a mining country in the UK anymore. That went in the 1980s. But mining around the world is still very important.

Eleven years ago this weekend, we first heard of the Chilean miners. A group of miners in Chile digging for copper and the mine collapsed behind them.

And on Sunday the 8th of August 2010, we woke up to the news there'd been a further collapse and the situation looked dire. Well, two weeks passed and with frantic effort, they managed to locate the miners and amazingly found they were all still alive.

They'd survived for two weeks on two days' worth of emergency rations. It was over two months before they were able to bring them to the surface. And does a terrible experience like that, albeit with a happy ending, mean that people no longer go and take these risks under the ground?

[14:09] No, it doesn't. And we hear again and again of similar things in China and elsewhere, not always ending so positively. When we treasure something, we will go to great steps to get it.

We will put ourselves to great inconvenience and even to great danger. And that is the message of the first 11 verses. It's about physical wealth and the search for it.

And then the writer switches without any real warning and he says, OK, this is all very well, but what about wisdom? He says, actually, wisdom is a lot more difficult to find than gold and silver and precious stones.

You go to the places where you find in these precious things and imagine asking them and they say, no, not here, not under the ground, not under the sea.

It is really difficult to find. But he says also, it's really, really valuable. You can't buy it with these most precious things that humans spend so long looking for.

[15:22] It is much more valuable than that. And the book of this section is taken up with this praise of wisdom, this thing that is beyond compare.

But I think that something is very important here before we move on to the last section. And that is that we can't find wisdom without effort. We can't get wealth, physical things, without effort. We can't really become wise unless we work at it. We are not innately wise. Yes, we have intelligence, we have judgment, but we don't have true wisdom.

And to achieve true wisdom, we need to be willing to do hard work. Now, how do we get wisdom? Well, we're going to look later on and we get wisdom primarily by knowing our Creator and fearing Him.

And we can have a living relationship with God. We can have the Holy Spirit guiding us and helping us to live our lives wisely. We also gain wisdom through this book.

[16 : 27] The book that is full of God's wisdom and that says to us the things that God wants us to know. And that's where a lot of the effort needs to come in.

It's great at church on a Sunday morning to read the Bible together and to think about it. It's great to spend time each day reading the Bible and taking devotional thoughts from it, letting God speak to us through it.

But to get the best treasures, to really get the value that is in the Bible, is going to take study and it's going to take hard work.

And we need to be prepared for that. There's a book I found really helpful in that. We don't usually have book reviews at our services, but this one is on theme and it's an exceptional book.

It's called Dig Deeper by Nigel Bennion and Andrew Sack. And what it is, is quite simply a toolkit for mining spiritual things.

[17 : 31] We're going into the Bible and for understanding it. So among the tools, for instance, are some we've used this morning. We've used the context tool for Job 28. We've used the structure tool.

We've used the repetition tool with these two verses that were quite similar. There are lots of tools in this book that will help us as we seek to understand God's Word and to dig deeper into it.

It's simple. It's easy to read. It's got lots of examples and exercises. I thoroughly recommend it, though only if it results in you going to read your Bible. It's not a substitute for the Bible. It's something to help us to get into Scripture.

But we need to put a bit of effort into getting the wealth that God wants us to have and to gaining wisdom through Him. So that was the search for wisdom.

Let's move on then to the source of wisdom, which is from verse 20 onwards. So we've looked down and we've been down the sea and the earth, and the writer says, you can't find wisdom there.

[18 : 34] Wisdom is very elusive. It's very difficult to find. So where then does it come from? Where does understanding dwell? And he re-enters again how difficult it is.

Living things, birds don't see it, distraction and death personified. Say, yeah, we've heard of it, but we don't really know too much about it. And then he says, the way to wisdom is through God.

Being wise in life is having a relationship with God that is right and recognizing Him for who He is. And we have a bit of a preview in these verses of what we'll see in much more detail in two or three weeks' time as we see God responding to Job and just presenting His majesty and His greatness and how superior to us He is.

And the writer says, where is wisdom? It's in the Creator. It's in the one who made this wonderful world, who made all of us and who has complete understanding of everything.

And so at the end, the last verse is another key verse in the chapter. God says, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding.

[19 : 49] The fear of the Lord in this context, I believe, means recognizing God's greatness and how superior to us He is and putting our trust in Him, recognizing that He knows what He's doing and that what He does is always right.

If we just get a little bit technical for a minute, when it talks about wisdom here, it's a slightly different phrase from what's used earlier in the chapter. Earlier in the chapter, it talks about the wisdom. So verses 12 and 20, we say the key verses, it really says, where can the wisdom be found?

Where can this thing that is called wisdom be found? In this verse, there's no articles, it's just that is wisdom. And really what the writer is saying is the same as the Proverbs say several times, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Fearing the Lord is a wise thing to do. So in other words, you don't, as soon as you fear God, you don't suddenly become all wise and God-like.

But it is the starting point. Unless you recognize God for who he is and trust in him, then you will never get to the heart of wisdom.

[21 : 00] So you start with your trust in God and then that's where the hard work starts we were talking about earlier as God leads you further into wisdom. Let's go back to Minecraft to end.

In Minecraft, as I said, you have a choice of whether you're in a survival mode or in creative mode. And if you've got a group of friends playing together, they've all got to be in the same mode.

You're either survival or you're creative. In the real world, the thing that truly demonstrates God's wisdom is that the Creator came into the world of survivors.

That the Lord Jesus, who is the one who made everything, who is responsible for our whole universe and the way in which it works, he chose to take on the limitations and the frustrations and the sufferings of being part of creation.

He even allowed himself to be rejected by a mob and put to death. And that is the ultimate demonstration of God's wisdom.

[22 : 13] I think the great passage of wisdom in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. And a key verse is the one that is on the screen now. God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise and chose the wise things of the world to shame the strong.

In other words, what God did was totally against human wisdom. He sent his son into the world to die on a cross and Paul says that's a stumbling block to Jews and it's foolishness to the Gentiles. It's something that is utterly degrading or appears utterly degrading for the creator to do and such a stupid thing to be involved in.

And yet, it's in the cross of Jesus that we truly see the wisdom of God. That we see what God is really about and how he has this all-wise view of creation.

He's not a God who just sits and soars above us the creator and looks on all of us as pawns and things just to be moved around and things happen to us for his pleasure.

[23 : 35] Rather, he's a God who recognized our suffering and recognized the consequences of our sin and chose to come and be part of that through Jesus.

And as we go through Job and we've not talked much about suffering this morning, we'll be back to it in future weeks. But as we see the suffering of Job, we need to think also about the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

that the one who was the creator chose to suffer in ways which we can never fully understand. And he is wise and wisdom is to be found in him.

And we can only be wise in this world if we have that relationship with the living God that recognizes he is in control, he has done everything that we need to have a relationship with him and to be wise. But we need to fear him. We need to trust him. Our prayer this morning as we finish is that everyone here, everyone who's watching on YouTube, that we will come to know and to fear and to love the Lord, to recognize his sufferings and that only through them can we have forgiveness for our sins and when we suffer to keep our trust in him and retain our confidence that he is wise.

[25 : 09] That is wisdom for us to know God, to love him and to obey him. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word to us today.

We thank you for this great chapter extolling the value of wisdom but particularly pointing us to you as the true source of wisdom. We thank you for the way your wisdom is displayed through the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world and his death on the cross for us.

Help us all to make sure that we have the starting point of wisdom which is coming to put our faith in the Lord Jesus entering into a living relationship with the God of heaven.

And then help us when we go through all the difficulties that surviving in this world entails that we may nevertheless retain confidence in you and recognise that although we may not see it you have a purpose in everything.

Thank you for your presence with us this morning. We pray for your blessing on us as we part now. in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.