



About Job 28

Michael Walsh

One morning some notices appeared taped to all of the toilet cisterns around the mine offices. They said something like this:

Talent night, Presentation night.

Performances, poetry.

All geologists, engineers and metallurgists welcome.

Come along to an evening of fine food, fine wine and entertainment.

The only price of entry is your performance. Spouses not permitted.

So get together with your friends, come along, relax and show us your act, be it song or dance.

7:30 in The Telfer Restaurant, Wednesday.

As it was only Tuesday morning, and the show was the next night, there was not much time to organize anything, but already I could see various small groups getting together to dream up some act to perform. And from what I overheard, most would be bawdy and loud, and with the dominant subjects being beer, sex and what they did while drunk. It didn't take me long to decide that Wednesday would be a good night to stay at home.

During that Tuesday, work was seriously interrupted by various little groups planning what they would do, and from what I gleaned, I became more convinced that my plan to stay at home was the best one. A few blokes asked me if I was going along, or if I wanted to join them. I thanked them but said no.

By that time in Telfer, it was well known that we were Christians, but few really understood what that meant. To most people all they really understood was that we went to church, read bibles, and didn't get involved in "fun stuff". A few poked fun, but most people around the mine respected me, so they did not make much sport of my refusal to join in with their riotous night out.

The next morning, Wednesday, it was clear that planning for the night was progressing with great vigour by many small groups. They were each determined that their act would be a grand, non-forgettable event, and were planning to outdo the others in loudness, lewdness and drunken fun. Or at least that was what it looked like to me. I went home for lunch and gave Felicity an update on the progress. She asked again if I was planning to go along, and I told her again "Of course not", and sat down.

But as I sat down a voice came to me, the voice that I have learned to recognize as the voice of the Lord. He said "You should go along".

"Oh, what?" I thought.

"And what could I possibly do?"

"Or who could I join with?"

"Who would have me?"

"It starts in six hours."

"Besides all that, it's too late now. Applications closed this morning."

But he said "Go along and read chapter 28 of the book of Job. They are miners. It will be good for them to hear it."

"Oh Lord", I prayed, "Are you serious?"

"Yes." He said.

I turned to Felicity and told her what had just happened and that I thought that maybe I'd better go along; "I've been told to", I said.

I got my Bible from the study and started to read through Job 28, and as I did I realized that it was good. In fact I already knew that the first half of chapter 28, in fact the whole chapter, was a magnificent passage. It had struck me with great force when I had first discovered it. But to read it to a bunch of mining professionals who hated church, and who ignored God, was something else.

"How will you get in?" asked Felicity. "Haven't applications closed already?"

"I'm not sure. I guess I'll just turn up and tell them I'm a late entry. I don't think they'll turn me away."



In the back of mind I was thinking that if they had six hours warning that I'd be coming along to read to them from the Bible, they'd cancel me for sure. So my plan to just turn up at the last minute seemed best to me. Felicity shook her head, as she does when she realizes that I have made some totally unpredictable decision again. It is a look that says "That crazy man. What will he dream up next?"

I went back to work for the afternoon and wondered what I would say if anyone else asked me if I was going along to the event that evening. I didn't want to tell anyone what I was planning, but I didn't want to lie about it either. If I told them what I was going to do, I didn't think I'd be able to handle the hushed whispers just out of my ear-shot, and the suspense. But, neither did I want to deny the Lord if I was asked. I just didn't want the fuss.

As it happened nobody asked me again that afternoon, and I told no-one.

The evening was planned to start at 7:00 so I turned up at about ten past, so that I would not be conspicuous standing in the queue, as the surprise late entrant, with my large bible tucked under my arm. Gerard Danckhert, Senior Planning Engineer for the open pit was at the door, and when he saw me he looked a little surprised. He quickly looked down at his list, looking for my name and the name of my act.

I told him I wasn't there yet, "I'm a late entrant", I said.

"Ah, ... what will you be doing?" he asked.

"I'll be reading a passage from the bible", I said, keeping the look on my face as non-committal as I was able to, and looking him straight in the eye. He fixed me with a steady gaze and was silent for a few seconds, but then he added my name to the list.

"We don't have a seat booked for you, but there is a spare place at that table", he said, pointing to a table where a few guys that I knew, but normally didn't have much to do with, were sitting. I sat with them and put my bible on the table. They looked at it and one asked what I would be doing. "I'll be reading a passage from the bible", I said. That was the end of that part of the conversation, and the subject quickly changed.

The meal and the wine were good, and the evening progressed fairly predictably. As the night wore on, and the participants became a little (or a lot) more drunk, the acts became more and more tasteless, and some were downright disgusting. But there was one light that shone in the darkness when Martin Whitham read a poem that may have been from Blake. I recognised it but didn't know what it was.

Finally Gerard read out, "And now we have one last surprise entry, Mike Walsh will read to us from the Bible". There was silence; dead silence. You could have heard a pin drop, even on the carpet. All eyes turned to me. Some with a look like horror on their faces as they wondered what disaster was about to fall and ruin their evening.

I stood up and began in a steady voice.

"This passage is from chapter 28 of the book of Job. Many scholars believe that this was written somewhere around 4,000 years ago. I think you will like it." I knew they would recognize the things that Job had written about. They are things that all miners know.

I continued:

"There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.

Iron is taken from the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.

Man puts an end to the darkness;
he searches the farthest recesses
for ore in the blackest darkness.



Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft,
in places forgotten by the foot of man;

Far from men he dangles and sways.

The earth, from which food comes,
is transformed below as by fire;

Sapphires come from its rocks,
and its dust contains nuggets of gold.

No bird of prey knows that hidden path,
no falcon's eye has seen it.

Proud beasts do not set foot on it,
and no lion prowls there.

Man's hand assaults the flinty rock
and lays bare the roots of the mountains.

He tunnels through the rock;
his eyes see all its treasures.

He searches the sources of the rivers
and brings hidden things to light.

"But where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell?"

Man does not comprehend its worth;
it cannot be found in the land of the living.

"Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?"

God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells,

And he said to man,
'The fear of the Lord--that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding.' "

I stopped and looked at them all. Then I was greeted by thunderous applause. The loudest I'd heard that night. Many were on their feet, standing up, applauding as loudly as they could. It seemed to go on and on. It was the standing ovation that performers dream about. It finally died down and I could sit down with a deep glow of satisfaction inside.

Many were commenting on it. "Wonderful!" they said. "Amazing!" they said.

The General Manager called me over. "That is one of the most amazing things I've ever heard. How did you ever find that?" he asked. I was still holding my bible, so I glanced at it, then back to him, "I read this." I said. They had survived it, so had I, and we were all better for it.

The rest of the evening passed off smoothly and the food, the wine and coffee were good, and I went home a happy man to tell the tale to Felicity. The Lord had won again, as He usually does.

I think that I went up another notch in their estimation of me, but I'm still not sure if it awakened in any of them a desire to get to know the Lord and his word any better.

Some became even more convinced, I'm sure, that I was totally unpredictable, but relatively safe.