

"ELIHU"
Job 32:1-37:24
Maggie Fitzpatrick

In this week's lesson a new character arrived on the scene – Elihu. Elihu introduced some new insight about suffering that was different from Job's and his friends. Reflected in what are called Elihu's "speeches", was his understanding of why Job suffered and Elihu defended the justice and the greatness of God, drawing attention to God's divine providence and His redemptive purpose in suffering.

Elihu's speeches emphasized God's authority over mankind. It's been said that "Some of the biggest cases of mistaken identity are those who have trouble remembering that they are not God."

From Elihu's explanation for suffering, to God's marvels in the heavens, Job, and we the readers, may better understand the magnitude of God's sovereignty:

- He is: "...in complete and total, independent control over every creature, event, and circumstance in every moment of history. He is subject to none, influenced by none. God does what He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. Everything that happens is either caused or allowed by Him for His own perfect purposes." (gotquestions.org)
- "All that comes to pass in our lives is according to the perfect eternal plan of the all wise, all powerful and all loving Father." (Doctor Donald Gray Barnhouse)
- "God has Satan on a leash. Nothing can touch us unless it passes through the will of God." (Jack Hibbs)
- "The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen." (Isaiah 14:24)

There are four general themes in Elihu's speeches:

1. The rebuke of Job
2. The evaluation of pride
3. The majesty of God
4. The purposes of God in affliction

Likely surrounding Job and his three friends were several people from Job's community. They may have been there to gawk at the hideous sight of Job, or to hear Job and his friends argue, to sympathize, or perhaps to find out how **they** could avoid the affliction Job was experiencing.

Elihu was likely one of the bystanders; quiet, taking in everything the four men discussed. Elihu's name meant, "my God is He." Although younger than Job and his friends, Elihu often expressed great understanding about who God is. In his speeches he often emphasized the power of the Almighty as the foundation for all God's actions, including allowing Job's suffering.

Some scholars thought Elihu was an angry, brash, overconfident, long-winded, young man. But others saw Elihu as a prophet of God, a messenger who approached the righteous Job to improve his understanding of God. Yet, Elihu may have overly generalized some of what he understood Job to say.

I doubt he knew shorthand to record exactly what Job and his friends debated during their 28-chapter-long discourse.

By God's testimony, Job was "blameless and upright." (Job 1:8; 2:3) That didn't mean Job was sinless. In Hebrew, "blameless" means someone whose life exhibits integrity. To be "upright" means, "just" or "moral." In short, Job was a man of integrity and was moral.

Although Job's lifestyle was above reproach, Job's friends believed his suffering was **because** of sin. However, Elihu's opinion was that Job's sin appeared **after** affliction and suffering struck him. Like all mankind, saved or unsaved, our "flesh" is inherently sinful and sin surfaces even with the righteous.

Elihu said he couldn't keep his words bottled up and yes, he was long-winded. Once he began speaking, he spoke and spoke and spoke some more. Hang on for a six-chapter ride from this young orator.

Last week's lesson ended with Job's final protest of innocence. Job and his three friends have nothing more to say to each other. They were at an impasse about what each believed was the reason for Job's problems. "So, these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1) meaning they weren't going to get anywhere with him.

Elihu wasn't happy with Job: "Elihu became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God." (Job 32:2) Basically, Job didn't like how God ran the world. David Guzik explained: "Job was more concerned about **Job** being right rather than **God** being right." He defended his innocence to the point of opposing the integrity of God's justice.

Elihu listened to Job's "supposed" friends blather on about their opinions, so he wasn't too fond of them either. "When Elihu saw that the three men had nothing more to say his anger was aroused." (Job 32:5) They believed Job's sinfulness was the reason for his suffering, but had no proof. His friends focused on Job's **sinfulness**. But Elihu focused on God's **purposes**.

Elihu's words and speeches in these chapters were written in a style that is sometimes challenging to interpret. After consulting various translations and commentaries, I paraphrased some of Elihu's words in a more current vernacular.

Elihu claimed his words were inspired by God who teaches wisdom. Elihu said, "Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age. But there is a spirit within people, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It's not only the elders who are wise and understand what is right." (Job 32:7-9). He was correct because the psalmist wrote: "The Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6) Personally, I want both knowledge **and** wisdom because: "Knowledge is identifying a tomato as a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad."

So, the stage was clear for Elihu to speak. He admitted he was young and out of respect for Job and his friends who were his elders, he waited until they finished speaking. Filled with the Spirit of God, Elihu began to speak, and certainly his anger would have been apparent:

"Since I'm younger than all of you, I've been quiet up until now because I thought what you had to say would be wise and helpful, but true wisdom comes from God alone and I think He wants me, someone younger than any of you, to tell you what I know. I've listened to what all of you had to say, so, it's my turn to speak." (32:4-10)

Elihu was compelled to speak in defense of God and challenged Job for believing God's justice was flawed in allowing him to suffer. Elihu invited himself into his elder's discussions, declaring:

"Listen to me. I've waited while you spoke and I listened to your arguments. I gave you my full attention but none of you has proved Job wrong. You four sit here baffled with nothing more to say. I won't remain silent. I have a lot to say and the spirit within me urges me to speak." (32:10-12,15-18)

Elihu's speech begins in chapter 33. He rebuked Job, believing Job said he had never sinned. Actually, Job said he was "upright" and had not disobeyed God. Job had not claimed to be without sin, but that he was innocent regarding the **reason** for his suffering. However, Elihu's rebuke of what Job said about God, **was** justified:

"Answer me if you can, Mr. Job. I heard you say you're 'pure', that you 'have done no wrong' yet you say God has 'found fault with you and feels you are His enemy.' So, if you **are** pure, then did God invent reasons you're His enemy? You're wrong because, God's understanding is greater than any of ours and it's arrogant to complain that God doesn't answer you." (33:5, 8-10,12,13)

Elihu then told Job how God speaks to mankind and why:

"You don't think the Almighty speaks to us? God **does** speak to us in different ways. Sometimes He uses warnings in one's dreams and visions. Still another way is through physical pain. I know you're definitely on a bed of pain with constant distress in your bones, wasting away, feeling as if you are nearing death. (33:14-16,19-22)

Hear me Job, the reason God does this is to turn people from doing wrong; to keep them from pride; to preserve them from the grave. Yes, Job, the pride thing includes you." (33:17,18)

The second theme in Elihu's speeches was that of pride. The source of Job's pride was self-pity. For a follower of God, self-pity is: "feeling sorry for oneself, fueled by a **high** view of self, a **low** view of God, and an attitude of entitlement." John Piper said "self-pity is the response of pride to suffering." Job's pride caused him to disregard God's sovereignty, question His actions, demand explanations, and revealed inaccurate beliefs about God.

"When you question God's wisdom or step over His boundaries, you're telling yourself that you're smarter than God. He is worthy, good, great in power, just and righteous. He is a wise God who draws a righteous person through affliction, back to Himself." (Paul Tripp)

Elihu continued his speech describing another way God speaks to mankind, that is by a special a messenger-mediator. Many scholars believe this messenger was a foreshadowing of the role of Jesus Christ - the Divine Mediator, who would bridge the gap between humanity and God. Elihu described the mediator in Job 33:23-28:

- He would tell people how to be right with God.
- He would be gracious and spare them from going to the Pit of death.
- God would accept the Mediator as the ransom.
- People could be restored to righteousness.
- Through Him people will admit they did not get what they deserved.
- Through His redemption, the Mediator reaches out for the lost over and over again.
- He is one Mediator of out a thousand, meaning no one is like Him.

Apostle Paul said: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all." (1 Timothy 2:5,6)

Certain Scriptures can have more than one meaning, and I reflected upon the numerous accounts in Christian news media about those in the Middle East who say they've seen visions and dreams of heavenly beings. In some cases, those "beings" have led them to Jesus. Could the angel mediator also be such a messenger?

Elihu ends chapter 33 with these words:

"Pay attention, Job. I'm not finished. If you have something to say, tell me, because I would like to clear your name. But if not, be quiet, and I will teach you wisdom." (33:31-33)

In Job 34, Elihu called Job and his friends "wise ones", either out of respect or maybe sarcasm, and he continued to refute Job's belief in the injustice of God. When Job was shaken by grief, pain, and affliction, he spoke proudly against God, that it was "unprofitable" to serve Him.

"Wise ones, you're supposed to be older and smarter than me and I'm sure in some things you are, so after I speak, we can decide what to make of all Job's complaints. Job, you've said that you haven't done anything wrong and God is unfair; that He has 'deprived you of justice' – taking away your right to be heard by Him and from Him. Wise ones, have you ever known anyone like Job to speak so irreverently about God? And Job, you sound like the ungodly by saying, 'A man gains nothing when he becomes God's friend.' You actually believe it's pointless to serve the Almighty?!" (34:2-5, 7-9)

Let me tell you that first, God can do wrong, even if you feel He hasn't treated you how you think you should be treated. Second, God is going to repay everyone for what they've done. Third, the Almighty cannot pervert justice! That's like saying God can deny His own nature and character, which is impossible!" (34:10-12)

Elihu's next point was that because of God's majesty, the third theme in his speeches, God is beyond accountability to man and he asked Job some questions:

"Job, please answer this, who appointed God over the earth? No one, because He's in charge. If He chose to, He could remove His spirit from the world and all life would cease and mankind would return to dust. (34:13-15)

Do you think God could govern the world if He hated justice? How can you condemn the Mighty Righteous One? (34:17)

God doesn't play favorites with the rich and famous and turn His back on the poor. God created them all. He knows what people do and how they live.

The wicked **will** be destroyed if they refuse to follow Him. The wicked cause the poor to call to God and God hears them. God will punish those who turn from Him and treat the lowly wickedly. (34:19,21, 26-28)

Job, this is especially for you because I think God's silence bothers you more than anything. When God chooses to remain silent how can you declare Him guilty for doing so? (34:29)

And I'm not quite sure I understand what you've said. If you say, 'I have endured my punishment' and promise not to sin anymore, but then you say, 'I don't know what I did wrong', are you confessing or not? (34:31-32)

Job, do you realize what your "friends" have said? That you speak without knowledge and have no understanding. And get this! They think you should suffer even **more** severely for the wicked way you talk about God and that rebellion should be added to the sins they are **certain** you've committed. Hey, you chose your friends, not me!" (34:35,36)

There's more to come from Elihu, but I felt sorry for Job. I picture him sitting on the ground, in horrible pain, with the whole community staring at him, judging him, all the while he knew he was innocent of their accusations.

The fourth theme of Elihu's speeches is God's purposes in affliction, another unpleasant word for suffering. No one wants to sign up for the school of suffering. Yet, God uses suffering and trials to get our attention. C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God's megaphone rouses a deaf world to:

- instruct them (34:27; 36:9, 36:10, 15)
- open their ears to correction (33:16)
- have them repent (33:17; 36:10)
- turn them from pride (33:17; 36:9)

- save them from Hell (33:18,30)

For the redeemed, trials and suffering can be powerful instruments of discipline to refine and spiritually mature us.

"God disciplines us for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12: 10,11)

And Apostle Peter wrote: "Rejoice even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that our faith is genuine, our righteousness may mature, and God may be glorified."
(1 Peter 1:6,7)

And deliverance **will** come. Elihu told Job, "Those who suffer, [God] delivers in their suffering."
(36:15) No matter what affliction we face, deliverance awaits us!

In chapter 35, Elihu is nearing the end of his rebuke against Job but he has more to say about his attitude toward God:

"I'm confused, Job. You said you're living blamelessly, then you said, 'Why bother living righteously if it doesn't get me anywhere with God?' First you claim you're innocent, then you say it doesn't matter whether you sin or not and what difference does it make to God if you **do** sin? (35:2,3,6)

Job, look up and see how high the clouds are. You can't affect them or make them move. That's how it is with God. He is sovereign. Whether you sin or live righteously, it won't change God or affect His actions. (35:5-7)

Let me give you one reason why God is silent. The ungodly are proud and indifferent to God. And to the proud, God is silent. Could that apply to you, Job?
(35:12)

Another reason for God's silence is that you complain you don't see Him and that you're waiting for Him to respond to you and that He won't punish transgressors. You open your mouth and the words that come out are nonsense! It truly doesn't sound like you know what you're talking about!"
(35:14,15,16)

In chapter 36, Elihu has more to say about God's purpose in suffering:

"Be patient with me a little longer, Job. I haven't finished defending God. I want to give you arguments for the righteousness and justice of my Maker. God despises no one and understands everything! And Job, He **will** act against the wicked and give justice to the oppressed. God uses affliction and suffering as

correction tools, to show people their sin and tells them to repent. He instructs them **by** their affliction. (36:2,5-6,8-9)

Mr. Job, I will end on a positive note and offer you a warning. God will deliver those who suffer. He is wooing **you** from distress to comfort. However, you're obsessed with the wicked being judged. Don't turn to sin because that's why you've been tested by affliction." (36:16-17,21)

And then, the heat is off Job. Elihu stopped **rebuking** Job and started **exalting** God. The fourth theme in his speeches is "the Majesty of God." Job 36:22 through Job 37 is called, "Elihu's Hymn of Praise." He praised the sovereignty and power of the Almighty by asking Job:

"Have you heard of any teacher like God? Has anyone had to tell Him what to do or that He's done wrong? Oh, they may try, but He makes **no** mistakes! Join those who exalt God for His works for He is beyond our knowledge. He has no birthdate because He is eternal!" (36:22-26)

Elihu reminded Job, "God shows Himself exalted by His power" (36:22) and did so using beautiful poetic language. Elihu's purpose was to impress upon Job that God's creative power gives Him the right to be the moral Judge of the world.

Job, do you know how God causes it to thunder? I'm sure you've witnessed lightning bouncing through the clouds. Lightning and thunder are symbols of His unequalled power and creativity and He uses them to let mankind know He exists, that He judges them, and provides for them." (36:27-33) "Who can understand how God spreads out the clouds, how God thunders from His pavilion?" (36:29)

As a California girl, I've been in only one real electrical storm while visiting family in Kentucky. For those of you who have experienced such a phenomenon in nature, "You know that it can be a terrifying **and** awe-inspiring experience. Perhaps Elihu, Job, Job's friends, and the audience around them, were sitting outside when a great electrical storm was occurring. Elihu described a storm in chapter 37, maybe even gesturing upward to the sky as he exclaimed:

"When I hear the noise of a storm like that, my heart feels like it will leap out of my chest! Listen Job! Listen to the rumbling roar of God's voice as it booms across the heavens with lightning flashing in every direction. No one can mistake the deafening roar of His voice. No one can comprehend the greatness of God's power." (37:1-5)

When you were a child, were you told that thunder was caused by angels either rearranging furniture or bowling in heaven? The ancients likened thunder to the voice of God. Psalm 29:7 declares: "The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning." There isn't a sound in nature that doesn't more exemplify the majesty of God than that of thunder. For our ancestors, thunder, lightning, and torrential rains were perhaps the greatest mystery in the natural world.

God is the force behind all weather and Elihu used the marvel of it to show that God moves in every flicker of lightning, every drop of water:

"God tells snow and torrential rains: 'Fall on the earth!' By His breath, He sends whirlwinds and causes waters to freeze. Job, do you know how God loads the clouds with moisture and flings lightning through them? He tells them to swirl around and around over the face of the earth and they do exactly what He commands.

Stop and consider God's wonders. Do you have any idea how He orchestrates the marvels of storms? Do you know how He controls the clouds and makes them just hang there in the sky? And Job, it's God's hand that makes temperatures soar and the wind die down so there's no breeze, which makes you sweat and wish you had worn better deodorant." (37:6,10-12, 14-17)

Elihu said **why** God uses weather to demonstrate His power: "Because it will serve as His sign to all mankind, so they may know His work." (37:7) God uses weather for His purposes, either for discipline, for the good of the earth, or to express His faithful love for us." (37:13)

How can we understand all God's creative works? The prophet Isaiah recorded that God said: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8)

Apostle Paul provided additional truth, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" (Romans 11:33-36)

In the closing words of Elihu's hymn, his last words to Job, he painted a picture of God so brilliant and awesome that the only response any audience should have is that of reverent awe:

"Out of His mountain God comes in golden splendor. He's surrounded by the brightest light. People cannot fully understand the Almighty but He is exalted in power! (37: 21-23)

In this lesson, we learned that Elihu addressed Job's sin of pride and his diminished view of God. Regardless who his audience was, Elihu boldly represented the Almighty. He reminded Job, God is the Creator, He is beyond our understanding, greater than any mortal, does no wrong, is just, righteous, and mighty. He is to be exalted.

Three words sum up what Elihu reminded me: **God is sovereign**. Because His ways are **perfect**, then we must trust that whatever He allows to happen is **also** perfect, and trust Him whether we understand His will or not.

We must trust the only One who can tie a rope to a sea monster and walk it around like a pet (you'll understand that when you study next week's lesson!)

Speaking about next week's lesson, the very next voice Job will hear will be the voice of God Himself speaking directly to him.

God is coming in His "golden splendor and awesome majesty." (37:22)

The God whom Elihu believed was unreachable, is about to show up!

Father, how marvelous You are! You are powerful and just, righteousness and sovereign.
Through our afflictions, teach us to trust and worship You - to accept what comes from Your hand and to bring You glory.

We love You Lord. In the name of Jesus, we pray.