

Elihu's Rebuke Job 32-33

As we finished Job 31 in our last session we read the words, "The words of Job are ended." So Job has said all he had to say in regards to his three friends. As far as he was concerned, their conversation was over. As we open chapter 32 we read, "So these three men ceased to answer Job." It's clear that Job's three friends feel the same way – the conversation is over. What is interesting is that now we are introduced to a young man who apparently has been observing the conversations of these four men the entire time. While these men are finished talking, it is now this young man Elihu who must get some things off of his chest. As he sees it, he must right some wrongs and that is what we are going to see for the next few weeks. Tonight, we are going to hear Elihu rebuke Job's three friends and Job himself. Elihu finds fault in both sides of the conversation and is determined to share his wisdom on the matter.

Ch. 32

I. Anger with Job

Ch. 32 begins with an interesting statement that Job's three friends stopped answering Job because "he was righteous in his own eyes." Essentially they were not getting anywhere and they knew when to quit beating a dead horse. They came to terms with the fact that they were not going to accomplish what they had hoped which in many ways was to have Job affirm that they were right – their aim certainly wasn't to comfort Job. Now, the statement "he was righteous in his own eyes" could easily come off as Job thought too highly of himself but to believe that is to miss the point – the real point here is that Job viewed himself as God did – as a blameless and upright man. Job's three friends knew that as long as he clung to that view, they were not going to get anywhere.

That doesn't mean that Job wasn't without fault. That is the point that Elihu is going to make. Right out of the gate, Elihu makes it clear why he is angry with Job and his three friends.

Before we go any further though, we need to answer the question – who is this guy? Who is Elihu and where did he come from?

The answer, in short form, is that we are not given much information about Elihu. We are provided with the name of his father and his family clan. While we don't really know much about this information what it does tell us is that Elihu was a real person. We are also told that he is the youngest of all these men (Job and his 3 friends) and that he has quietly waited his turn to speak. What we are going to see from Elihu is quite interesting because by the end of the book, Elihu is the only one of these men not rebuked by God. In addition, the words of Elihu provide us the closest explanation as to why God does what He does and in a roundabout way, he acts as a bridge pointing us to Christ.

One of the first things we learn about Elihu is that he "burned with anger." This is a rather strong statement. He clearly understood the order of things. He was the youngest and acted accordingly. He let all four of these men speak and when he perceived they were completely finished he took his turn. As you are very well aware, we have been studying the speeches of

these 4 men for several weeks. Elihu was just as tired of hearing these men speak as you most likely were reading about them. He clearly didn't like what they had to say and as they spoke his blood was boiling. He finally gets a turn to speak and we immediately find out why he burned with anger towards Job.

“He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God.”

This was Elihu's beef with Job. Job had declared over and over – “I am not guilty.” We know that to be true based on the information that we were given at the beginning of the book. However, Job's argument led him down the path toward the sin of pride. He believed himself to be in the right which led to his questioning of God's righteousness. What is the problem with this and why was Elihu so angry about it? Job's argument is going to naturally make someone look good and someone look bad. The problem is that Job's claim that he was righteous and being mistreated made him out to look good and “correct” and as a result it made God out to be “incorrect” and in the wrong. That is most certainly a prideful position and this is Elihu's frustration with Job – he is in no position to question God's purpose and certainly not in a manner that makes himself right and God wrong.

More on this later, but Elihu's basic argument is that as a believer, how we act during difficult times can be a reflection on God. Simply put, our actions should not cause others to perceive that God is in the wrong.

II. Anger with Job's Three Friends

In verse 3, we read that Elihu “burned with anger” for Job's three friends because “they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong.”

Elihu recognizes that these men found no answer that could explain God's ways. What is interesting about this is that if you asked Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar about this they would most certainly argue the opposite. However, the truth was they didn't know. It would be easy for us to condemn these men because they didn't know the ways of God but I don't believe that would be fair because that in itself is not the problem. The problem is found in the fact that even though they didn't understand what God was doing, they acted as though they did. In addition, Elihu's real anger with these three men was a result of their false accusations against Job. They did not know why Job had suffered the way he had – they did not truly understand what God was up to – and yet they knew what they believed to be true about God and they were determined to justify their belief regardless of the cost. As a result, they falsely accused Job so that they would be right.

As Elihu stated, they had no answer and yet they declared Job to be in the wrong. This caused Elihu to burn with anger – unwise men pretending to be wise.

III. Why Elihu Must Speak

It is interesting to note that we learn of the reasons for Elihu's anger from the narrator – it doesn't come straight from the mouth of Elihu himself. In verse 6 we hear Elihu speak for the first time and for the rest of the chapter he is essentially going to tell us why he must speak.

He begins by declaring his positive motives. He understands the rules. He is the youngest and he has waited his turn. He was afraid to speak up earlier, most likely because of the cultural norms, but now he recognizes his time to speak. Whether it is a dig at these 4 men or not, Elihu explains his thought process:

- He was going to let the old guys speak so he could hear their wisdom

After all, that is where wisdom is supposed to come from right? The more aged and experienced. However, after hearing them speak that certainly wasn't the case. Elihu's first major point follows in verse 8:

- He states that it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand.

This is Elihu's way of stating that wisdom comes from God – more directly it comes from the Holy Spirit. A man can be as experienced and as old as he wants and it doesn't guarantee wisdom. Wisdom is only guaranteed from God.

That is essentially what Elihu declares in verses 8-9 and in verse 10 he insinuates that he is listening to the Holy Spirit – that is where his wisdom comes from and as a result these men should listen to what he has to say.

First, he is going to rebuke what the three friends of Job have said. He declares that he has listened to their words and essentially that is all they were – words. There were no answers provided – no wisdom. They were unable to refute Job or provide him with an accurate answer. All they provided were their answers – they wanted to be right! In addition, Elihu appears to argue that these friends simply passed the buck to God and in doing so they would bear no responsibility. They wanted to be right and did not recognize any responsibility to actually be correct.

Basically, Elihu goes on to say that he has waited long enough – “shall I wait because they do not speak?” It is his turn and he is going to provide some wisdom and give some answers. In a sense you can almost feel Elihu's intent as – It's about time someone spoke some truth!

Elihu closes this chapter by reiterating the point that it is his turn to speak – he can wait no longer. He is full of things to say and he is ready to burst (compares himself to a wineskin with no vent). He believes that speaking the truth will bring him relief and others desperately needed insight.

In an attempt to prepare these 4 men, Elihu makes it clear that he has no intent to flatter – in fact, he doesn't know how. He is simply going to be impartial and speak the truth. That is what God wants him to do and so that is exactly what he will do.

Ch. 33

I. What I Am and What We Are

As we turn to chapter 33, we see Elihu speak directly to Job. Although somewhat repetitive, Elihu reminds Job that what he is about to say is completely sincere and of pure motive. As such, he compels Job to listen to him.

He calls Job's attention to the fact that God has made him and specifically he refers to the spirit of God as giving him life. There is a reason for this. He has already declared that it is the spirit of God that provides wisdom. The implication here for Job is that Elihu is prepared to deliver wisdom as he has been directly influenced by the spirit of God. Therefore it is in Job's best interest to listen.

At this point, it would be reasonable to believe that Job was possibly thinking – here we go again. In some sense, the words of Elihu to this point sound similar to the words of his three friends. They proclaimed to provide wisdom as well and so Job would have every right to be skeptical. However, what we will see is that the words of Elihu are a bit different.

Elihu tells Job that he can rebut what he has to say but it is wise for him to remember that they are essentially the same. Both men are made from clay by the hand of God. This is Elihu's way of demonstrating humility. He is telling Job that he is no better than him. Elihu is not superior and neither is Job. This comment alone points to the fact that Elihu's words and demeanor are different than those of Job's friends.

II. Job's Fault

Elihu tells Job that he has listened to what he has said – Job has claimed to be totally innocent “I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me.” Job has implied that God has made up false reasons to punish him. While Job has not directly said it, the implication is that Job is right and God is wrong. Remember, this is why Elihu burned with anger toward Job. Not only has God made up false reasons to punish Job, He has also followed through with it.

Elihu cuts straight to the point and tells Job that his is wrong about this. Elihu argues that God is greater than man. He won't be mistaken in what He does and under no circumstance will God be needlessly cruel.

Just so you don't miss it, there is an undercurrent to Elihu's argument – God always works with purpose. Job feels as though God is mistaken – maybe He doesn't know Job like He should or maybe there is some misunderstanding. Elihu makes it clear that this is not the case and to believe so paints a poor image of God. God acts with purpose – His ways are greater than the ways of man but there is always purpose – a good purpose and that is what Elihu is going to show Job.

III. God Speaks to Save

In verses 13-18, Elihu tells Job that God does still speak. Job has claimed that God doesn't hear him or answer him and Elihu pushes back on that. Elihu tells Job that God speaks with a purpose. He tells Job that God still speaks through dreams and visions. He does so in order to warn men. The major warning that Elihu speaks of is a warning against pride.

I believe it important for us to note that the root of all sin is pride and selfishness. Essentially it is one declaring that he has a better idea than God. In some sense, that is what Job has done in claiming that God is mistaken and has harmed him without cause. It is interesting to note as well that Job spoke of this very thing in Job 7:14 – He himself had been terrified through dreams and visions. Elihu seems to be implying that God was trying to warn Job of succumbing to his own pride.

Why does God do that? Again – He acts with purpose. Elihu states that God warns through dreams and visions in order to keep a man's soul from the pit. God is trying to save those he warns.

IV. God Acts to Save

Elihu continues and appears to argue that if a man continues down the road of pride that God can send a sickness to grab his attention. He speaks of a serious sickness that is accompanied by intense suffering to the point that a person doesn't want to eat and begins to waste away.

When we get to verse 23, things begin to get really good. Elihu begins to speak of a mediator. The idea is that a messenger from God will declare to man what is right for him, in other words, a way to be freed from his sin. Both the visions and the sickness are intended to draw a man towards repentance. The mediator that Elihu speaks of speaks to God on his behalf and tells God that the man has been ransomed and is saved from the pit. The man is then healed and becomes increasingly joyful – he has repented of his sin and accepted God and his life will now look upon the light and live for God.

There is a strong salvation motif here and Elihu's intention is to show Job that God is acting in his best interest. He does not act out of misunderstanding or cruelty but instead he acts out of love. He acts to save.

V. God's Purpose is Good

Elihu closes this argument by reinforcing the fact that God does all of these things with a purpose. His purpose is to redeem and save his creation – as Elihu puts it, “to bring back his soul from the pit.” While Job does not perceive anything good to come out of his miserable condition, this is exactly what Elihu is communicating to him. God acts with purpose and His purpose is always good.

Job was a blameless and upright man – He did encounter difficulty – In many ways and especially from the human perspective his difficult situation was not warranted – he was not being punished for sin – and yet, as Elihu has explained – that does not mean that God cannot

use Job's situation for good or that He cannot teach through it. Although we may not be able to see it, God always acts with a good purpose.

Personal Implications

1. As Believers Our Actions Reflect God

We read at the beginning of chapter 32 that Elihu's anger burned hot at Job because he justified himself rather than God. As a result, Job's actions, and even words at times, painted a poor picture of God. To assume that Job was right is to assume that God was wrong, or at best mistaken. Job was looking through a selfish lens as if the world was centered around him – at times his friends did allude to this. While Job was correct that he had been blameless and upright, he failed to see that God was acting with a purpose. Admittedly this would be tough to do but as followers of God we are to place our complete trust in Him – even when things don't go the way we desire. With that being said, how we react in difficult times, or at any time for that matter, is a direct reflection of our faith and of our God to a lost world.

Ephesians 2:10 – Workmanship

Genesis 1:27 – Image

Everything we do, everything we say, and how we carry ourselves regardless of situation should point others to Christ, not away from Him.

2. Age and Experience Don't Guarantee Wisdom – Only the Presence of God Does

Elihu tells us that he thought age and maturity should produce wisdom but Job's friends have proven that is not the case. This is an important lesson that we have seen earlier in the book but one we would be wise to remember. Age and experience don't guarantee wisdom. That is not to say that age and experience cannot bring wisdom but they must ALWAYS be accompanied by the Spirit of God if true wisdom is to be found. As believers, we should strive to be wise counsel to those around us, especially the lost, but in order to do so we must be grounded in Scripture and a relationship with God that allows us to hear the Holy Spirit speak in our life.

3. Effective Counseling Will Always Come From a Position of Humility

I believe there is much for us to learn in Job 32:4. We read that Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they (his three friends) were all older than he. To this point, Elihu has provided the most beneficial word to Job. It is no coincidence that it comes from a position of humility. Nothing about Elihu was brash. He even goes out of his way to express that what he says comes from a sincere and humble position. Notice 33:6 – I am just like you before God. Effective counseling will always come from a position of humility and equality. Elihu didn't present himself as greater than Job. He recognized he was a man just as Job was. It was not Elihu's words that should terrify Job but the words of God. Elihu was simply trying to convey what the Spirit of God had laid on him. If we are to be effective as counselors and ministers of the gospel, then we must do the same. We must come from a humble position – it is not I who has the answers but God, I am simply a messenger made of the same cloth as the one I am speaking to.

4. God Always Acts With Purpose

Perhaps the greatest lesson for us in these two chapters, and the chapters that will follow, is that God always acts with a purpose. That is the main idea that Elihu is trying to get across to Job and his three friends. God doesn't act in a chaotic way. God doesn't act in a cruel way. God acts in order to save. Everything that he does is done to draw men back to Himself. We will see more of this in the weeks to come but as believers we must never forget, regardless of how dark our situation looks, that God acts in order to save.