

God's Justice and Man's Impatience

Job 34-35

Introduction

Last week we were introduced to a young man named Elihu who had patiently waited his turn to speak to Job and his three friends. Unbeknownst to us, he apparently had been hanging around listening to the several rounds of speeches between Job and his friends. He didn't like what he heard and longed to provide what he believed to be real wisdom. What we saw from Elihu last week in his first speech did in fact appear to be different. While frustrated with Job and his three friends, Elihu did appear to have a genuine concern for these men. He spoke out of humility and called upon these men to recognize that God always acts with a purpose – that purpose being to save men. This week, we are going to look at a second and third speech from Elihu. This time, he is going to emphasize God's Justice while condemning some of Job's actions and motives. I believe what we see, for better or worse, is a different Elihu than we saw last week but regardless of his own flaws, he points us to some truths about God that have some bearing on the way we respond in difficult situations.

Chapter 34

I. A Different Elihu (v.1-10)

If you remember from last week, Elihu began speaking by declaring his upright and pure motives. He was a frustrated man – frustrated because he felt as though Job's friends had judged him improperly and provided no true answers. He was also angered with Job because he felt as though Job's position and argument, whether intentional or not, portrayed God in a bad light. Even so, Elihu met the cultural standard by waiting his turn to speak and even when he did so he spoke from a position of great humility. He declared to Job that he was a man made of clay and was no better than anyone else. He also declared to all four men that he had no intention of flattery – he only wanted to speak the truth as he was guided by the Spirit. For the most part, that is what we got from Elihu in his first speech. It was a stark contrast from what Job's three friends had presented earlier.

However, now we get to Elihu's second speech – he is warmed up now and what we see is a different side of Elihu. I want to provide a disclaimer here before we go any further and that is the simple fact that these passages are tough. It is tough to discern at times what Elihu is really trying to say and the position he is coming from. You can look at commentaries and throughout history, individuals have interpreted the words of Elihu in very different ways. Tonight I am going to try and do my best to present these chapters but immediately they should remind us of three important truths:

1. Study the Scripture for yourself. Pray over it. Ask God to clarify it for you. Follow the words of 2 Timothy 2:15. You have a personal responsibility to study the Scripture on your own.
2. Pray for your leadership. You have a responsibility to adhere to 2 Timothy 2:15 while your leadership bears the weight of James 3:1. Pray for your own clarity but also the clarity of those who present the Word to you week in and week out.

3. Our words matter and our aim should be two fold. First, we should strive to adhere to the Scriptures in all that we say, do, and teach. Second, we should strive to be as clear as possible. Our words can be interpreted by different individuals in different ways. Therefore, we must recognize clarity as our friend.

I mentioned that we were going to see a different side of Elihu today and it doesn't take very long for that to happen. As we look at chapter 34, Elihu begins by referencing Job and his three friends (the entire group – Hebrew plural) as “wise men.” If you remember last week, Elihu denounced these men and declared them unwise. He expected wisdom from them but didn't get it. Their old age in itself – their experience – could not provide it because true wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit. If that is the case, then why is Elihu referencing them as “wise men” now? Two possible options:

- A. Sarcasm – there is the possibility that this is an intended insult directed at these men
- B. Flattery – Elihu wants to be heard and therefore he is buttering up his audience.

If we really wanted to be generous, we could assume that Elihu is simply referencing the age of these men but that would directly contrast with what he previously said about wisdom and age. I'm not sure if sarcasm is what Elihu is aiming for but we also know that in 32:22 Elihu claims he isn't going to flatter these men because he doesn't know how.

Being completely honest, I don't know exactly what is going on here but I believe what is important is the fact that there has been a shift in Elihu's approach – either way, he no longer appears to be coming from a position of humility. It is interesting to say the least.

To his credit, Elihu does still charge these men with determining whether what he says is right or not. He appears to be on a quest for the truth which is commendable – he doesn't declare he is in the right simply because he believes himself to be.

What is different here though is the fact that Elihu accuses Job of two faults and in many ways appears to take a very similar position to that of Job's friends. Elihu declares that Job has argued that God has given him no justice – in a sense he has questioned the justice of God – at least as Elihu sees it. Job has a right that God has not given him. In a way, this is directly connected to Elihu's reason for anger in his first speech. On a simplified level – Job's argument could be broken down to Job is right and God is wrong and Elihu takes offense to that.

Elihu also lumps Job in with the wicked. I really believe there is a strong argument to be made here that Elihu doesn't go as far as Job's friends by declaring that he is indeed wicked but at the least Elihu is telling Job – you are at least acting like them almost as if to say – shouldn't there be something different about you? I'm not seeing it because you are acting just as the wicked would act.

Even greater, Elihu accuses Job of declaring that there is no gain or benefit to worshiping God. That is the implication in verse 9. The problem with this accusation is a lack of evidence for it. The closest

supporting argument for this is Job 21:15 in which Job states “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him.” While Job did say this, he was referencing the thought process of the wicked and certainly not himself. Job is a righteous man and it appears as though Elihu is either stretching it a bit or doubling down on the comparison between Job and the wicked. Either way, he does appear to go too far in his accusations of Job, just as Job’s three friends have.

Regardless, Elihu does point us to the truth about God’s justice. Specifically he declares three things about the justice of God.

II. God Must Be Just (v.10-15)

Elihu has interpreted the words of Job as an accusation against God that he has done wrong. He makes it clear that God is completely just. He states twice (in v.10 and v.12) that God does not act in a wicked manner. While Job claims that he has not received justice Elihu states that God will not pervert justice.

*It is interesting to note that I believe both men can be correct at the same time on this point.

Elihu’s support for his argument comes in verses 13-15. Who gave God charge over the earth? This is a rhetorical question and the obvious answer is no one did. There is no one over God and as such He has to be just for if he was not who would rein Him in. Elihu goes on to say that if God desired, He could wipe mankind off the face of the earth at any moment – God could simply return them to dust. However, this doesn’t happen because that is not in God’s character. Just as Elihu said in his first speech – God does not act maliciously or without purpose – He acts to save.

III. How Could God Reign If Unjust (v.16-20)

This next group of verses is difficult but I believe that Elihu is attempting to reason with Job by comparing God to earthly kings. His key argument seems to be, Is it possible Job that you really believe that someone who hates justice could reign and govern over all? On top of that, you would condemn the most righteous and mighty of all – God!

What person in his right mind would call a king worthless or wicked? Would you do that Job? Would you walk up to them and call them that to their face? Even if they act as they should and show no partiality? That is what a just king does – they don’t regard the rich more than the poor, but you condemn them?

God is even greater than these kings and yet that is what you do. It doesn’t add up or make sense. It would be impossible for God to reign in the manner that He does if he were unjust.

Elihu goes on to tell us how God does act justly.

IV. God Acts Justly (v.21-30)

First and foremost, God sees and knows all things. His eyes are on his creation and he knows the ways of man and each of his steps – there is no guess work or lack of knowledge on the part of God. The evil

cannot hide their ways and God has no need to do deep investigative work – He has no need for deep deliberation because He knows all things. He simply acts accordingly and justly.

He has the ability to dispose of the wicked in the darkness or in the open and he will do just that – He will deal with the wicked. He can do so with a single man or with an entire nation – there is no limit to his justice.

If we know that this is how God acts, then who can question Him or condemn Him? (This appears to be Elihu's major beef with Job)

V. A Model Response (v.31-37)

Next, it appears as though Elihu attempts to lead Job in the proper response to God's justice. It is almost as if Elihu thinks, Job – you have screwed this up but you can fix it...

The appropriate response is to acknowledge your mistakes, your sins, and to repent. Elihu calls upon Job to act humbly and to be teachable (In some ways though, hasn't Job already don't this?)

In Elihu's mind, this hasn't happened – Job hasn't acted as he should. He goes on to ask Job if he really believes God should act according to what Job thinks or desires. It is almost as though Elihu is asking if God is bound to the preferences of Job – Should God just act like Job wants him to?

Elihu ends his second speech by telling Job that he is the one that must decide. Job must decide whether the words of Elihu are correct or not. God either acts justly or He does not – there is no grey area. Elihu desires that Job answer him but we see no answer. As such, Elihu finishes by declaring that all those around should agree with his position that Job is speaking without knowledge. God is completely just.

There are some very questionable things that Elihu has said but one truth that he gets right is the fact that God is completely just and for us to question his justice in the way that He acts or by assessing our own situations is completely wrong of us.

Chapter 35

Elihu's third speech is rather short and consists of one main point – Job should stop looking for his own gain and start looking for God.

I. Looking for Gain (v.1-8)

Elihu has just spoken at length about the justice of God and now he is going to turn his attention to Job. Basically he asks Job, do you think the way you have been acting has been just? You are too concerned about your rights – what you should get and your own gain.

It is understandable that Job is frustrated and quite simply doesn't want to experience what he has gone through – what man would? However, Elihu, in a sense, is calling on Job to look beyond himself. He asks Job to look at the heavens and the point he is trying to make is that God is higher than Job – His ways are higher than Job's ways.

If a man sins, what effect does that have on the ways of God or God himself?

If a man is righteous, what does God gain from it?

In some sense, this is a dangerous proposition or argument that is presented by Elihu but in other ways I believe he is on to something. It is possible that this line of thinking would cause a man to question the purpose of his actions and could lead to a defeatist attitude as if nothing matters – that is certainly not what God desires from a man. God desires that man avoid sin – sin separates man from God and grieves God – Genesis 6:6, Psalm 78:40. On the other hand, it brings God joy when man is righteous and it aids God in furthering His kingdom. At the same time, Elihu does have a point. The purposes of God will be completed with or without any individual action by mankind and we can add nothing or take nothing away from God.

The point is this – Elihu desires that Job move beyond himself. This may be too harsh of a reprimand upon Job but at the same time it is a point that would serve most of us well. We should desire to be in fellowship with God but not for our own gain. Scripture calls us to not think too highly of ourselves as that only leads us on the path to more sin. We are not the center of the universe and I believe that is the point that Elihu is trying to make. God is going to act but that does not mean that it will be in the manner that we desire. However, we can trust that God will act in a just and righteous manner.

II. Looking for God (v.9-16)

Elihu is telling Job that he needs to move beyond himself and start looking for God. He makes the argument that people in difficult situations often cry out for help but rarely do they look to God for that help. He is telling Job this is the wrong approach. God is the one that is in control and yet everyone wants answers from somewhere else. It is the pride in man that causes this – they cannot bring themselves to ask God for the help they need. God doesn't hear an empty cry.

Now this seems like a valid argument but does it apply to Job? Job has been crying out to God. He has been longing for an answer and help from God and yet Job has not received it. Whether Elihu is referencing Job or not, I do not know, but he does appear to speak to this matter next.

In my opinion, verse 14 is worded in a difficult manner – especially depending on the translation. With that said, I believe the point to be that Job must be patient. It may seem like his cries to God are not

heard but to his benefit he has been crying out to God. Elihu states that the case is before God. He has already told us that God is just and the implication is that God in time will act in a just manner according to Job – Job must simply wait on him.

Personal Implications

1. Strive for Clarity
2. God's Justice is not to be Questioned
3. God is to be at the center of our life
4. We are to trust God's timing