

A New Perspective

April 22, 2018

Job 32-33

As we continue our study of the book of Job, as I indicated last week, we are entering a new phase. Rather than debating back and forth, we here are introduced to answers, to solutions to the problems. We have heard the end of Job's perspective and now we hear from a new character, Elihu. Once he finishes, the Lord Himself will speak up. So it seems to me that Elihu is a transitional figure, bridging the gap between the worldly wisdom of the friends, to the wisdom of Job the sufferer, to the wisdom of the prophetic Elihu, to the authoritative wisdom of God Himself.

I say, "Elihu the prophet" because I believe this is how he sees himself. By definition, a prophet is someone who claims to speak for God. He speaks on behalf of God to the people. And know that the standards for prophets are high. If you claim to speak for God and are wrong, the sentence is death. You don't just get to say whatever you want as a prophet, not one of Yahweh's prophets.

So, Elihu sees himself as a prophet, even if we don't see that precise word. We will see pretty clear evidence in chapter 32 that he speaks as a prophet. He presents himself on the scene, not as a wise old man, but actually as a younger man who must build up his courage to speak to these older men. He is young, but he is one in whom is the Spirit of God and out of whom comes words that God has placed there, just waiting to burst forth to illumine the scene. He has waited long enough and now the words have to come bursting out from within him. Elihu is someone called by God to speak into the situation.

So, let's just hear from Elihu himself, as he gives the first of four speeches, Job 32-33. As we hear the text, I ask you to pay special attention to what he says about God speaking through pain in chapter 33. It is deep, it is profound. See if you can spot something that ought to ring bells for us all. READ Job 32-33.

Main point: God is NOT silent when we suffer unjustly. Indeed, He speaks to us through the pain to draw us to Him.

Yes, from Job's perspective, God has been silent. He has challenged God to speak up, to answer his pleas, his questions, his challenges. But Job's great frustration is that God is silent. Well, Job is about to hear from God through His prophet Elihu. And what he hears will not only begin to put Job in his place, but will instruct us in ways that go way beyond the book of Job. Listen closely, we may actually hear the gospel! (2 parts)

I. Wisdom is good, but prophecy is better. ch. 32

Once more, I see here in this great book of wisdom a check, an unexpected check. Wisdom is good, but prophecy is better. We have heard words of wisdom, limited worldly wisdom from three of Job's friends, real wisdom from the man of God (Job). But now, someone comes along to remind us that wisdom is trumped by prophecy, that speaking for God comes not solely through the collected information gathered from the events of life, but can also come through a man speaking solely through the prompting of the Spirit of God. And the implication is clear: Elihu's prophetic words are better than all the wisdom thus far. In other words, sometimes God just wants to tell you what you need to know. You can't always understand through wisdom.

v.1- So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

The three friends stopped the debate because they were getting nowhere. Job was stuck on his position that he had done nothing to deserve the suffering he was enduring. It was all unjust...and he is right. He is right, he does not have a distorted view of his own righteousness to deserve or not deserve such calamity, that is not the issue. As we have seen multiple times, Job knew he was a sinner. But because we know the backstory to this whole scene, we too know that he had done nothing to deserve the calamity he suffered.

But this does not mean that Job is right about everything. Indeed, many times we have cringed when we read his perspective, particularly when he impugned God and His motives. He did not deserve what has come to him, but this doesn't mean that God sinned against him. He has wrongly impugned God's character, and Elihu is here to begin to correct that.

2 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.

This is the problem: Job sees no fault in himself justifying what has happened, while at the same time he finds fault in God for what has happened. This is wrong. God has not wronged Job. He has not sinned against Job. Job's sin is that his limited perspective, clouded by his suffering has led him to draw some wrong conclusions about God. This has made Elihu blow a gasket. Notice how many times his anger is mentioned.

3 He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him.

Elihu is also angry at the three friends for wrongly assessing the situation and therefore giving Job bad counsel. Indeed, God Himself will share this perspective. They were wrong in their wrangling against Job, but this does not mean Job was not in the wrong. He too was wrong as we will see.

4 Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. 5 But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused. 6 So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: “I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. 7 I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’

Elihu has sat through all of this back and forth, listening, waiting for the truth to be spoken. After all, the four men here are considered wise men, really wise men, the wisest of wise men. And who is Elihu? He is some young man who would probably come across as a punk if he spoke up. This was a meeting of the wise, and Elihu has no street cred.

8 But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. 9 It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. 10 “Therefore I say: Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know.

There it is. At least three times in this section, Elihu will appeal to the Spirit. Now, as you perhaps can see in your translation, there is no way to tell from the Hebrew whether he is referring to the spirit of man or the Spirit of God. For me, the context seems clear. It is the Spirit of God (capitalized) who is prompting him to speak. Yes, God leaned over Adam and breathed into him the

breath of life. But I also see even in those words that it is a divine Spirit rather than simply a human spirit. So, here, Elihu speaks even though he lacks wisdom street cred because he is speaking for God. The Spirit of God is prompting him and they ought to listen, even though they are the old, wise ones.

11 I waited while you spoke, I listened to your reasoning; while you were searching for words, 12 I gave you my full attention. But not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments.

He sat and soaked in the conversation. As one in tune with God, he waited for one of these “wise” men to say what God was putting in his heart. But none did.

13 Do not say, ‘We have found wisdom; let God refute him, not man.’ 14 But Job has not marshaled his words against me, and I will not answer him with your arguments. 15 “They are dismayed and have no more to say; words have failed them. 16 Must I wait, now that they are silent, now that they stand there with no reply? 17 I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know. 18 For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; 19 inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst. 20 I must speak and find relief; I must open my lips and reply. 21 I will show partiality to no one, nor will I flatter any man; 22 for if I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would soon take me away.

Don’t you just love the inner struggle he articulates here? “How long can I keep my mouth shut?” “I have to respond. The Spirit of God (notice again) is compelling me to speak up.” “I can’t hold it in any longer. I MUST speak!” “I will be careful not to say things for my own benefit, I’m not going to puff myself up as if I am anyone, BUT I MUST SPEAK UP! I HAVE TO!”

I don't know about you, but I love this chapter. This young whippersnapper has been sitting on the side observing. But the longer he sits, the more frustrated he becomes with the conversation. No one is speaking for God! No one is saying what God would say! I have to say it. Wait! I can't! I'm not old and wise. But I have to! Now, I know there are many people among us who have no clue about this because they never have such a compelling urge. But there are others among us who can relate to every word. Some of us live Job 32.

But the point I want you to see here is that what is prompting Elihu is the Spirit within him. Wisdom is good, but hearing from God directly is even better. I think Paul makes much the same argument in I Corinthians I that the foolishness of God (the gospel) is wiser than the wisdom of man. And this direct word from God does not just come to old wise guys. It can (and does) come to the young as well. In fact, Peter quotes the prophet Joel on the day of Pentecost about God speaking through the dreams of young men, through both men and women. When God wants to speak directly to people, he can use anyone He wants. He can even use donkeys!

I know some might think I am opening up a can of worms, but I also caution you to make sure you are actually being prompted by God and not by your insatiable need to say something. There are many, many people who think they are speaking for God, but who are actually just spewing forth their opinions. Elihu was clear that God was prompting him.

II. God is not silent as we might sometimes suspect. In fact, sometimes He speaks to us through our suffering. ch.33

This is where Elihu gets deep. This is where we have to pay close attention lest we miss the profound things he is saying. This is where we once more get to hear the gospel in the book of Job.

33:1 “But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. 2 I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. 3 My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know. 4 The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. 5 Answer me then, if you can; prepare yourself and confront me. 6 I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. 7 No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you.

There it is again: Elihu is being prompted to speak up in the presence of distinguished men by the Spirit of God Himself. He knows he is nothing special. He knows he is just a man. He is not claiming special knowledge or deeply insightful wisdom. Rather, he is being a faithful spokesman for God. Test his words for authenticity. He then quotes Job:

8 “But you have said in my hearing— I heard the very words— 9 ‘I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. 10 Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. 11 He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.’

This is Job’s perspective: Job has done nothing wrong, and yet God has wronged him, wrongly finding fault in him as evidenced by what has come upon him. The quotations are accurate. I’m not going to take the time to point back to where Job has said such things, but it has been clear that this is Job’s perspective.

12 “But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than man.

The problem is that Job has claimed God has wronged him. And the answer from Elihu is Job has not treated God with enough respect. He may not understand God's ways, but he ought to know God well enough to not impugn His motives. God is greater than man. In this sense, both sides (Job and his friends) have brought God down to human level. God has not wronged Job, but is simply doing something beyond Job's perspective. He is up to something greater than Job. This is good. Elihu is right on.

13 Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words? 14 For God does speak—now one way, now another— though man may not perceive it.

He then goes into the next problem with Job's position. Job has accused God of being silent, of not answering when he has cried out to him. Again, we have seen this numerous times. We also have noted that this is a common perspective for those who are suffering unjustly. We see the same sentiment in the words of Jesus on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"

15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, 16 he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, 17 to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, 18 to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.

God speaks through dreams, different kinds of dreams in different kinds of circumstances. You may not think God is speaking, but He is bringing thoughts to your mind while you are not listening for them. By definition, your brain is shut off while you are sleeping. But that doesn't mean He is being silent. He is communicating with you while you sleep. This one we understand. Some

of us experience more of this than others. But I am confident that God is speaking to all of us when we are not aware He is doing so. A thought comes to our minds, we don't recognize its source because we weren't seeking it, but it is God. That is the point here. But then he goes deeper and more to the situation.

19 Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, 20 so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal. 21 His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. 22 His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death.

This one might be more difficult to see, and I didn't even see it until I read about it. The word, "chastened" or "rebuked" here indicates verbal communication. So, Elihu's second example of God speaking is when He does so to someone "on a bed of pain." He speaks through pain. Pain sometimes comes to us as communication from God. In this case, it is not a result of sin, not a consequence for wrong, but simply communication with God. C.S. Lewis writes in his book, *The Problem Of Pain*, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." It's been awhile since I read this book, so I don't know if he got this from Job 33, but the concept is certainly central here. Pain is used by God to communicate with us, to get our attention, to shout to us. It is the opposite of God being silent. Pain itself is God shouting to us. That is Lewis' point and Elihu's point here in Job 33.

But that leads us to the next point, "What message is God sending in pain?" Elihu answers that beginning in v.23. Notice the key words that pop up in this section.

23 "Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, 24 to be gracious to him and say,

‘Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him’— [25](#) then his flesh is renewed like a child’s; it is restored as in the days of his youth. [26](#) He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God’s face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state.

Can you see it? Elihu here preaches the gospel. Notice all of the key gospel words: mediator, unique (one out of a thousand), to tell what is right, be gracious to him, spare him from going down to the pit, I have a ransom for him, flesh is renewed, restored, prays and finds favor, sees God’s face, shouts for joy, restored to his righteous state. Is this the gospel?

So, let’s see if we can wrap our minds around this profound truth. God speaks to us through our pain by drawing us to our Mediator who shows us a way to go, paying the ransom for our souls, displaying the grace and mercy of God, renewing our life, bringing us into the presence of God with joyous shouting, and granting us righteousness. Our Savior meets us in our pain. God uses our pain to draw us to Him. We, like Job, might be angry with God because of the pain, but there He sends His Son to meet us in the pain and use it to draw us into right relationship with Him.

This is deep stuff. This is good stuff. This will preach! Job was right, the pain was not punishment for sin. His friends were wrong. But Job failed to see the bigger picture that God was communicating with him through the pain. We know He was because Job has appealed to the Mediator before in 9:32-35, 16:19-21, 19:25-27. In those citations, Job has used the very words, the very thoughts Elihu uses here. God has been communicating with Job. Job just didn’t have a big enough perspective to see it.

But Elihu is not done. Notice where he goes next.

[27](#) Then he comes to men and says, ‘I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. [28](#) He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.’ [29](#) “God does all these things

to a man— twice, even three times— [30](#) to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him. [31](#) “Pay attention, Job, and listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. [32](#) If you have anything to say, answer me; speak up, for I want you to be cleared. [33](#) But if not, then listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”

Did you catch it? When Job recognizes God’s speaking through the pain and grabs onto his Mediator who pays the ransom and rescues him from the pit, he has a testimony to share. He will go to men and tell his story. “Let me tell you what has happened to me...” Rather than blame God for his troubles, he will celebrate the goodness of God. God does this “twice, even three times” meaning over and over again. This is how God uses pain to spread the good news. This is what God does through pain. God uses pain to show man the light of life. Huh! John uses this exact phrase in John 8:12.

Wow! We have stumbled upon a most important and deep truth, a truth that ought to give hope and encouragement to those engulfed by unjust suffering. The pain of suffering has redemptive value. It is not always sent as a punishment for sin. The bigger picture is that pain is regularly and often sent by God to speak to us, to draw us to our Savior, to rescue our souls from the pit, and to give us a message to tell others. Pain leads to gospel, through the One who suffered unjustly for us.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will treasure wisdom, but recognize its limitations.

- 2) We will take seriously if and when God is prompting us to speak.

3) We will broaden our perspective to notice God speaking to us even when we think He is silent.

4) We will see redemptive value in pain.

5) We will not allow pain to isolate us from God, but draw us to our Savior who wants to use it.

6) We will be prepared to tell our story of how God met us in our pain.