

God is Still God

Job 34-35

April 29, 2018

We come this morning to the 2nd and 3rd speeches of Elihu, Job 34-35. I repeat here my perspective on this somewhat hard to understand character that Elihu represents the transition from the wisdom of men to the wisdom of God. He speaks with a prophetic voice, not a wise old elderly man, but a young whippersnapper who has listened long enough to the wisdom of Job and his 3 friends, and now does what the 3 friends could not do: answer Job.

We noted in the first speech, ch. 32-33 that Elihu's central point is that Job has made God too small, that God is greater than we are, greater than we think He is. He is not detached, not silent (as Job thought), nor as simplistic as the friends thought. Rather, God is bigger, more active, always taking note of what is happening. He is up to greater things than we can imagine. In all these things, Elihu is right on. He speaks the truth.

In these next 2 speeches, Elihu continues, speaking at times to the friends, but mainly at Job. Once more, Job has impugned God by charging Him with wrong. God has not sinned against him, but he (Job) has sinned against God by charging Him with wrong. It is impossible for God to do wrong. In this Job needs to repent, and eventually he will.

Further, in the 3rd speech, Elihu also takes on the question Job has asked about whether it is worth it to do good. If God causes good men to suffer, then why be good? As we noted in the related sections on the prosperity of the wicked, the question is a real one. Why be committed to doing what is right when it seems as though the wicked, who are NOT committed to doing what is right will themselves prosper? Again, this is a good question. Elihu's answer here takes us in a slightly different direction than you might expect, but it is one we need to ponder.

So, once more, hear these words from Elihu, a young man who claims to speak for God. I invite you to listen to them and discern their truthfulness. In fact, he is going to invite you to do the exact same things in v.4. READ Job 34-35.

Main point: Our great God is never guilty of wrong. And we do ourselves no favor when He claims He is.

I can easily see how Elihu has gotten to this point of great frustration with Job over this point. It has been painful to hear Job impugn God's character, God's sense of justice over his case. Yes, Job has suffered unjustly, but this does not mean God has done something WRONG. It simply means He is up to something bigger, greater. There is more to the situation than meets the eye. That is the case Elihu is building, a case that we would all benefit from pondering.

When something goes wrong through no fault of our own, it is easy to throw darts at God, blaming Him. After all, He is in charge, right? Instead, the warning here is that God is still God. He can do as He pleases, and He is good, even if we don't see it clearly in our situation. The truth is He is still God. (2 parts)

I. Since He is God, God is never guilty of doing wrong. ch.34

I know this seems self-evident, but too often we believe the opposite. And what does it say about us when we accuse God of wrongdoing? It means we think we sit in judgment over Him!

v.1- Then Elihu said: 2 “Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning. 3 For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. 4 Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good.

Elihu begins his 2nd speech by inviting his listeners to chew on his words. Let us test them together and see if they are right and good. I think it is instructive that he begins his speech this way as his whole point will be that God is good, in spite of what Job has stated. God never wrongs anyone. But Elihu humbly submits these words for consideration.

5 “Job says, ‘I am innocent, but God denies me justice. 6 Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.’ 7 What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water? 8 He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with wicked men. 9 For he says, ‘It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God.’

He give the gist of Job’s position. Job has been clear that He was innocent in causing the calamity that has come upon him. He thus claims that by sending the destruction, God has been calling Job a liar, and making him out to be a liar to his friends. He also has the perspective that his hope is gone, that his condition will be fatal. He ends this section of quotations by questioning whether it is really worth it to try to please God. This last issue will be the focus of c.35, so I am going to set aside for right now.

10 “So listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. 11 He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. 12 It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.

This is the central point of his argument: it is impossible for God to do evil. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong. It is wrong to ever charge Him with injustice. Thus Job has been wrong when he has leveled such accusations against God. Instinctively we know he is right. God is God! He sets the standards. He determines what is right. And He doesn't play with definitions and boundaries. God is the definition of integrity. So, if we think He is in the wrong, we must rethink our position.

Now, how does this differ from the wisdom of the friends? They simply appealed to some huge pile of unknown, unseen, private sin. They claimed God was just because Job deserved it. But as was made clear in ch.33, Elihu's position is that God is greater, there must be something more to the situation than we can see. In other words, the friends think they have the explanation, and Elihu appeals to God's character and says he trusts God to know something he doesn't. The difference may seem small to some, particularly Job, but the difference is huge. God ought to get the benefit of the doubt. He is not wrong, He is up to something bigger, beyond our perspective.

13 Who appointed him over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world? 14 If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, 15 all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust.

I see here evidence of the transitional nature of Elihu's speeches. This will be precisely the point that God makes in a few chapters. He is God. Here, Elihu makes the point that Yahweh is the supreme God, that there is no other god over Him. He answers to no one, and is never in danger of failing to fulfill His role as Almighty God. In fact, if He quit doing what He does every day, all of mankind would instantly cease to exist. He holds everything together, constantly.

Can you see how far this is from the perspective that God is in hiding, that you can never find Him when you need Him, that He is silent and thus negligent in fulfilling His responsibilities? Can you see how far this perspective is from our modern society which believes God is a concept made up by man to make man feel better? Thus, it matters not which god you believe in, as long as he/she/it/they/no one makes you feel better. They are all the same, made up by man.

No, the God of Scripture is supreme, and without Him, everything would fall apart instantly. And I would add that the more we know about science, the more we know this is true. Even the molecules of rocks are constantly in motion. Should the electrons, or other minute particles stop their prescribed orbit around the nuclei, what would happen? Everything would blow apart. Thus, God not only keeps living things alive, He keeps inanimate, dead objects from blowing apart. Oh, if modern man would only open his eyes to the truth about God and the world around him!

[16](#) “If you have understanding, hear this; listen to what I say. [17](#) Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One?”

Elihu has noticed in Job’s defenses that he thinks God is either unjust, or lacking in power to do something about it. In other words, Job has questioned God’s character. Now, we understand that from the perspective of one who is suffering. We at times say things to God while enduring suffering that we would never say otherwise. And in many respects, we know that God understands. He gets us. He knows what it is like to carry a heavy burden. (I think we hit that theme last week in ch.33!) But when we actually say out loud what we are thinking, or have repeated back to us what we have said, we would do well to repent of our hasty words. That is what Elihu is doing here. He is repeating back Job’s words and asking him to “reconsider” his impugning words against God. Here, does it make sense that the Almighty God who rules all hates justice? How could we accuse Him of such a thing!

He then follows with a list of things that God does which prove Job is wrong about Him. Now, in some ways, we might read this as being the same as Job's friends, but I don't take it that way. Elihu is not saying (as they did) that God always, only, and instantly did these things. Rather, he is saying this is who God is by character. In other words, we can all fill in the blanks where God did precisely the things Elihu describes here. This is who God is.

18 Is he not the One who says to kings, 'You are worthless,' and to nobles, 'You are wicked,' 19 who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? 20 They die in an instant, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and they pass away; the mighty are removed without human hand. 21 "His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. 22 There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. 23 God has no need to examine men further, that they should come before him for judgment. 24 Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place. 25 Because he takes note of their deeds, he overthrows them in the night and they are crushed. 26 He punishes them for their wickedness where everyone can see them, 27 because they turned from following him and had no regard for any of his ways. 28 They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that he heard the cry of the needy.

God put Pharaoh, the leader of the most powerful nation of his time, in his place. It is the same for Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, the list goes on. He treats the lowly with honor, He lifts them up. He has no need to curry favor from the rich. He strikes down as He pleases, in ways that show it is God who has done it. He sees all, knows all, takes account of all. No, history shows that God is active in His role of Almighty God of the universe. You cannot say that God has not acted with power and justice. That would be wrong.

[29](#) But if he remains silent, who can condemn him? If he hides his face, who can see him? Yet he is over man and nation alike, [30](#) to keep a godless man from ruling, from laying snares for the people.

And yet, He is still God. Again, Elihu's position is that God gets to be God. If He chooses to speak, He can. If He chooses not to speak, that is His right. If He acts, He is God. If He chooses not to act, He is still God. If He chooses to act or speak at a later time for His purposes, He is still God. He is over all, both individuals and nations. He is God! His ways are higher than ours. His priorities are good and all encompassing. As people, His creation, we don't get to tell Him what He must do. Agree?

[31](#) "Suppose a man says to God, 'I am guilty but will offend no more. [32](#) Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.' [33](#) Should God then reward you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know.

We don't get to set the terms with God. There is no negotiating with Him. We don't get to play politics, make deals, which we see play out on our tv's every day. You know, the "I didn't do anything wrong, but I won't do it again," or "it is not wrong for me, but it is wrong for him, or her."

[34](#) "Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me, [35](#) 'Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.' [36](#) Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost for answering like a wicked man! [37](#) To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God."

Elihu ends this 2nd speech with an appeal to Job to stop saying foolish things about God. Once more, we understand Job, we know where he is coming from. We have perhaps many times done the same thing ourselves, casting blame for our circumstances on God. But we must know that any time we say that God has done anything wrong or failed, we have crossed the line. He never needs to repent, He never needs to ask for forgiveness. He gets to be God.

II. We ought to live lives pleasing to Him. . .because He is God and we are not. ch.35

Why should we be good? If good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people, then why be good? As we have noted many times already, unjust suffering and the prosperity of the wicked are bookends of a theological problem. But this problem is at the core of the book of Job. If blessing does not instantly and automatically come to those who do good, then why do good? If punishment does not instantly and automatically come to those who do evil, then why not do evil?

Elihu here weighs in on this important topic.

[35:1](#) Then Elihu said: [2](#) “Do you think this is just? You say, ‘I will be cleared by God.’ [3](#) Yet you ask him, ‘What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?’

The sense here is that Job believes God will at some point clear him of wrongdoing, which He will. But Job’s perspective is that God therefore owes him, that God will have to compensate for what He should have done before. I mean, look at all those good works that Job has done. They have to count for something, right?

4 “I would like to reply to you and to your friends with you. 5 Look up at the heavens and see; gaze at the clouds so high above you. 6 If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? 7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? 8 Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men.

Bam! God owes you nothing for doing good things, just as it does not harm God when you do bad things. If you are totally pure, righteous, you still have nothing you can give to Him that He needs. He is God! He doesn't need anything from you. He is not sitting in heaven hoping you will pick Him. He does not feel lucky that you are on His team. Instead, your sin affects you. Now, hold off for a moment about the other dimension of this, but I want you to see Elihu's point here. God is God and thus is not hurt by your sin or helped by your good deeds. He does not NEED us.

9 “Men cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. 10 But no one says, ‘Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, 11 who teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?’ 12 He does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. 13 Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it. 14 How much less, then, will he listen when you say that you do not see him, that your case is before him and you must wait for him, 15 and further, that his anger never punishes and he does not take the least notice of wickedness. 16 So Job opens his mouth with empty talk; without knowledge he multiplies words.”

This is where it gets a bit deeper. The problem with our sin is that it affects our relationship with God. It creates a barrier with Him. The problem comes when we need the help of our Savior. So we cry out to Him for help. But

because of our sin, we have broken that relationship and He just might not choose to answer us. In other words, sin does not help or hurt God, but it does affect our relationship with Him.

He might not choose to answer man's cries because man is arrogant (v.12), thinking God owes him. Our relationship with God is not a "we give to get" scenario. We do not store up bargaining chips with God, and then cash them in when we need to. No, by definition, we have NO bargaining chips with God. I believe this is what Jesus meant in the Beatitudes as being "poor in spirit."

In Job's case, Job believes that God owes him for remaining silent when he cried out to Him. Job was under attack and God did not come to the rescue. He had done his part, but God had not done His. Therefore Job was wronged and God owes him.

To this, Elihu responds, "No He does not. God owes you nothing. He is God. He can do as He pleases. He is under no obligation to you because of your right deeds, or lack of bad deeds. In this Job has spoken wrongly about God, blaming Him for failing to heed his calls.

Now we get to the other side. As students of Scripture, we know there is more to this story. Indeed, our sin did hurt God. He did not have to, but He chose to deal with our sin by sending His Son to die for it. It cost Him dearly. If mankind had not sinned, Jesus would not have had to die. So our sin did impact Him.

And while it is true that God is under no obligation to us, we can expect that He will keep His promises, He will be true to His word. He didn't have to make such promises, but He did, and we can claim them as our own. Can you see the difference? There is no obligation on His part, but He will do what He said He will do. He doesn't owe us for believing in His Son, but He will save us from our sin through His Son.

Oh yes, there are benefits to having a saving relationship, an intimate friendship with the God of the universe. It will definitely help to have a friend in high places. I don't know about you, but I am completely dependent on God

keeping His word to me that if I confess my sin and put my trust in His Son for salvation, He will be true to His word and save me. He is under no obligation to do so, but He will. He promised!

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

- 1) We will fight the urge to make God conform to our ideas about Him.

- 2) We will focus our attention on the utter greatness of our God, rather than make Him like us.

- 3) We will refrain from placing any blame on God.

- 4) We will not see our good deeds as somehow putting God under obligation to us.

- 5) We will give glory to the Son of God, who chose to pay the penalty for our wickedness.

- 6) We will trust the promises of God.