

# God Gets to Define Himself

May 6, 2018

Job 36-37

Today, we finish up the words of the friends of Job. In our ongoing study of the book of Job, we come to Job 36-37, the fourth and last speech of Elihu. Elihu is the one who has sat and listened to the debate between Job and his three friends, who were trying to explain the catastrophe that came into Job's life. Job claimed his was a case of unjust suffering, that he had done nothing to deserve such treatment by God and would tell Him so to His face if given the chance, thank you very much.

The three friends in turn each explained the situation by claiming that Job must have a whole bunch of secret, unconfessed sin, which led God to treat him as He did. And now, Elihu speaks up as a sort of prophet for God. He claims that both groups are in the wrong. They are all misunderstanding the situation due to their limited perspective and understanding.

And, he claims, while Job may not have sinned to deserve such calamity, he certainly has sinned in how he has responded, particularly how Job has impugned God's integrity. Listening intently to everything Job has said, Elihu notes how often Job has blamed God for mistreating Him, accusing God of wronging Him. It is as if God is guilty of sinning against Job.

To Elihu, this goes over the line, this goes too far. His basic message is that God is God, that by definition He never sins, and that by character, God would never do such a thing. It is not who He is. Instead, what Job needs to do is repent and then allow God to be God, accepting what He sends from His hand, giving Him the benefit of the doubt, knowing that God's perspective is way beyond ours. When someone suffers unjustly under the watchful eye of Almighty God, it is because God is up to something bigger, greater, beyond our perspective. If we could see what He sees, it would make sense to us. And since we cannot see on that scale, we ought to trust Him to know what He is doing.

In today's text, we see more of the same. In this last speech spanning two chapters, Elihu seeks to explain first how God works in the lives of people and then he appeals to how God shows Himself in nature. Hear these words from a man seeking to explain why God does what He does. READ Job 36-37.

Main point: Almighty God sometimes uses pain to woo His people into right relationship with Him.

When we face struggles that seem beyond us or unfair to us, we must remember who God is and how He works in people's lives. He does not punish His own. If you think about it, that would defeat His purposes. Yes, He does discipline His children, but even that has a purpose to draw us closer to Him, not push us away from Him.

Perhaps the main thing I want you to get from these speeches of Elihu is that God is a big God, all-powerful, ever vigilant. And yet, He is also good, He wants the best for us. He is not out to get us, or neglectful of us. But putting these two things together in the context of unjust suffering requires that we expand our understanding of God, or simply come to peace with who He is even if we cannot understand it. That is the point Elihu is trying to make here. As we think about who God is, we cannot escape that He does the impossible, He constantly shows His great power, which is way, way beyond us. But we must also remind ourselves that His purposes for us are good, to help and not to harm, to draw us in, not push us away.

And yes, the truth is that sometimes He uses pain to woo us, as it says in 36:16. I know this stretches our understanding, but it is true.

So, as we work our way through the text, I ask you to focus on how God works in ways that are beyond us, but are assuredly in our best interests. He is right now wooing you to draw closer to Him, sometimes even using pain. (2 parts)

I. Our great God uses His power to draw to Himself. 36:1-25.

It might seem as though He is doing the opposite sometimes, leading us to think or speak ill of Him. But we must know that His intentions for us are good, not ill. And as we saw first in Elihu's first speech in ch.33, He will use pain to speak to us.

v.1- Elihu continued: 2 "Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said in God's behalf. 3 I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. 4 Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you.

As he has done before, he begins with an appeal for Job to listen to him. Notice the appeal to the source of his words, "from afar." I doubt this means Elihu has gotten it from some faraway place. Instead, he is reminding us that he speaks as a prophet, as one who has received his message from God. He appeals to God to confirm his words, that his words ring with authenticity as from God Himself.

5 "God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. 6 He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights. 7 He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever.

Despite what Job has claimed, God makes things right. He is not aloof, not distracted. No, God does not take His eye off His righteous ones. Notice that His own are assured of future glory. His purposes for His own are good. Again, we must keep in context that Elihu is not taking the position of Job's friends, that Job has deserved what has come to him. Instead, he sees it that God

is still present, active, good in the midst of the suffering. His ultimate purposes are still the same, still planning to bless His own, even if it does not seem like it right now. Can you see the difference? His friends say he deserved what he got, and he is just barely alive so that he can repent of his wicked ways. Elihu says that despite the way things are right now, God's plan to bless Job has not changed. God is still God, firm in His purpose.

8 But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, 9 he tells them what they have done—that they have sinned arrogantly. 10 He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. 11 If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. 12 But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge. 13 “The godless in heart harbor resentment; even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help. 14 They die in their youth, among male prostitutes of the shrines.

Elihu acknowledges that sometimes men are bound as in chains. Sometimes they are tied to affliction, to suffering. But His purposes are still good. Notice here the mention of arrogance. This was Job's problem. It is not that he was arrogant, which caused the calamity. It was that in his suffering, he has spoken arrogantly, particularly when he impugned God. And so, God has sent Elihu to speak to Job to stop his arrogance. In fact, Job is acting just like the wicked. God desires that Job simply obey Him, serve Him. He pleads with Job, “Don't do what the wicked do!” They remain in rebellion and die in rebellion.

15 But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction. 16 “He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.

I want to linger over these two verses. These, I believe, give us the core of Elihu's perspective on Job. Yes, sometimes God's people suffer. But in the midst of their suffering, God is speaking to them (as we saw in ch. 33). He has not neglected such people, He is speaking to them. He is wooing them. Notice the switch from 3<sup>rd</sup> person to 2<sup>nd</sup> person. He is speaking directly to Job. God is not aloof, he is wooing. He wants the best for you. He wants to bless you with every blessing. What has happened to you is not punishment, it is not due to neglect. What has happened to you has been God speaking to you, using the suffering to get your attention, attempting to woo you, to draw you in for good things. I don't think I can overemphasize the importance of these two verses in this context. God is at work, right now, seeking to draw you in. He is not forcing, He is not pulling or pushing. He is wooing in the midst of the suffering. Can you see this? Can you see how helpful this ought to be to those who are suffering? This is not judgmental, not some simplistic perspective. This is deep stuff, complex thinking, hard to wrap our minds around teaching. But it is the truth and is intended to teach us about how God relates to His people.

[17](#) But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you. [18](#) Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside. [19](#) Would your wealth or even all your mighty efforts sustain you so you would not be in distress? [20](#) Do not long for the night, to drag people away from their homes. [21](#) Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction. [22](#) "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? [23](#) Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, 'You have done wrong'? [24](#) Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. [25](#) All mankind has seen it; men gaze on it from afar.

Then he warns of the other side. Notice that Job is not the wicked but lumped in with the wicked. He is in danger of being enticed to go their direction. He warns Job not to yearn for the easy way out, the "solution is death" sort of approach. Beware of thinking like that. No, the solution is not ending the suffering through death. The solution is to exalt God in the midst of

the suffering, allowing God to draw us in, clinging to our Rescuer, acknowledging our dependence on our Redeemer. Don't give up on God, Job! He is right here right now, speaking to you. His purposes for you are fixed, steadfast, promises. Resist the urge to turn against Him, speak ill of Him, blame Him as if He has wronged you. Remember who He is and what He has promised to His own. He has not changed!

II. Our great God does stuff that is way, way beyond us. 36:26-37:24.

I don't know about you, but I know I need to be reminded often of these things. I think it is right and good to look at the world around us and be in awe of the One who created it and controls it. Indeed, this will be precisely where God will go with Job in the passages which follow.

26 How great is God—beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out.

This appeal to the greatness of God is repeated throughout Elihu's speeches. He is truly beyond our understanding. Trying to grasp who He is will necessarily short circuit our brains. Contemplating how He could be eternal is something we cannot fathom. Again, I trust you can see his point. We will inevitably short change God if we think we have Him figured out. He is beyond us. He is greater, bigger than we can imagine. We can perhaps keep a few divergent concerns before us. He can keep billions of concerns before Him without a glitch. He's really, really good at being God. Just think of the things He does in the natural realm...

27 "He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; 28 the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. 29 Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he

thunders from his pavilion? [30](#) See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. [31](#) This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance. [32](#) He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. [33](#) His thunder announces the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach.

I know we could explain these things from a scientific standpoint. But explaining things scientifically doesn't change anything. God does these things! He has created things in such a way that we can explain them scientifically. If they were not created by design, there would be no science. Science simply explains what happens. He makes it happen. Weathermen do not cause the weather. They are simply scientists who study how God created weather and then from years of studying how it happens, they give their best sense of what is going to happen next. They don't create lightning. God directs each bolt of lightning, each clap of thunder. All of that happens to show who God is.

[37:1](#) “At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. [2](#) Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. [3](#) He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. [4](#) After that comes the sound of his roar; he thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back. [5](#) God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.

Studying this text could not have been better timed if I actually planned it that way. This is storm season. I admit, this is how I think. Storms are God's handiwork to get our attention. I do not fear them, I respect them. I see God in them. I would love nothing more than sitting in a screened in porch watching a thunderstorm go through, or drive down the interstate watching God put on a show in the night sky. I love it!

6 He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth,' and to the rain shower, 'Be a mighty downpour.' 7 So that all men he has made may know his work, he stops every man from his labor. 8 The animals take cover; they remain in their dens. 9 The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. 10 The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. 11 He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. 12 At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. 13 He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love.

God uses weather to cause us to stop and contemplate Him. It all comes from Him to us as communication, revelation. Notice in v.13 that the same rain could bring punishment and love. It is the same water dropping from the same clouds, but it could be designed by God to have the exact opposite purposes for those under it. And as we know from living here, sometimes it is sporadic, falling here and not there, causing a tornado here and simply a good soaking rain only a few miles away. This is a good picture of what God is like, able to accomplish a variety of purposes in the exact same scenario. He truly is a great God.

Now he turns to challenging Job with his lack of such understanding. This is what God is like, and Job, you are not like Him. Again, when God speaks up in the next section, He will pick up right where Elihu leaves off here.

14 "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. 15 Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? 16 Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge? 17 You who swelter in your clothes when the land lies hushed under the south wind, 18 can you join him in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze? 19 "Tell us what we should say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness. 20 Should he be told that I want to speak? Would any man ask to be swallowed up? 21 Now no one can look at the sun,

bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. [22](#) Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. [23](#) The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. [24](#) Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?"

Can you see the picture Elihu has painted? God is great, I mean really great. He is awe inspiringly great. Who could dare to impugn Him, think he knows more than God does? Who would dare think God needs to hear what he thinks of the job He is doing? Who could seriously contemplate what God does every day and then dare to question what he has supposedly neglected to do in my case? Only a fool would do such a thing. Don't be a fool, Job!

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

- 1) We will regularly remind ourselves of the greatness of our God.
  
- 2) We will regularly remind ourselves of the character and promises of our God.
  
- 3) Based on our observations in #1 and #2, we will refrain from second guessing decisions God makes.