

**Considering Job
(Week 9)
Job 32-37
“The Sovereignty of God”**

Introduction

“Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite from the family of Ram became angry. He was angry at Job, because he had justified himself rather than God. He was also angry at Job’s three friends, because they had failed to refute him and yet had condemned him.” **Job 32:2-3**

His name was Elihu (Pronounced *el-ee-hoo*’ meaning “He is my God”), and up to this point, he had been just an innocent bystander, observing the back and forth between Job and his three friends upon the ash heap. He had listened intently to both sides of the argument that was growing more intense as it progressed. The more he heard, the more upset that he became. As was the cultural dictate, Elihu waited patiently until the older men had stopped speaking before he spoke. To have interrupted them would have been considered extremely rude, for he was much younger than they (**32:6**). So, Elihu held his tongue until he thought that he would explode (**vs. 18-19**). He had not been able to believe his young ears. These men were all much older than he, and they should have been wiser. But he was offended by pretty much everything that had been said. When he finally got his chance to speak, he took full advantage.

There is a message here for all of us. We must always carefully watch what we say, because there may be others who are affected by our words. It is so easy for us to cause people to stumble, when we don’t stop and consider those around us when we speak in anger or in foolishness. Job’s friends had shown themselves to be unbelievably cruel in their false accusations of him. And Job, while defending himself, had also said some pretty foolish things about God. Taken together as a whole, both parties had done considerable damage to the faith of those who were gathered to listen. An argument will always draw a crowd, and we must be ever mindful that; Man’s anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness (**James 1:20**). Elihu had been offended, not only by what Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had said about Job, but also with the accusations that Job had made against God.

Jesus warns us that we had better beware, lest we become a stumbling block to those who are younger and more impressionable in their faith.

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to fall away— it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” **Mark 9:42**

Pretty strong language isn’t it? You see, what we say does not only have an effect upon us, but to those around us. For those of us who are mature and have been walking with The LORD for many years, God expects our conduct to strengthen the faith of those who are weaker, not discourage it. In their zeal to win their arguments, Job and his friends had lost all sight of who might have been listening. They should have known better. Elihu intended to call them out on this fact.

Many Biblical scholars have offered various opinions to the rebuke that Elihu gives to Job and his friends. Some say he should have simply kept his mouth shut, while others agree with only part of what he said. Others still (myself included) think that the young man was spot-on in his rebuke. I find myself agreeing with every word that he said. Elihu may have been a young man, but he certainly leaves Job and his friends speechless with his words. When Elihu finished his “sermon”, God shows up in a whirlwind and takes up where Elihu leaves off.

I believe that God sent this young preacher ahead to “prepare the way” for God’s truth. I believe in this day and age of so much false doctrine, this is also the mission of The Church. Jesus is coming back soon, and we are to give rebuke and encouragement to any who will listen in order to prepare the

way of His coming. Elihu shows us just how it is done, in my humble opinion. He not only reminds Job and his three accusers of God's sovereignty, but of His marvelous grace, not wanting anyone to perish but to bring sinners to repentance and salvation. Job's friends had talked on and on about God's righteousness, but not a word had been spoken of His lovingkindness (grace). And while Job had gone on and on about his own righteousness, he had accused God of being unfair. The fact of the matter is that our God is both gracious **and** just in His dealings with men, and these men needed to be reminded of it. Job's sufferings were not caused by his sin, but Job's sufferings had in fact caused him **to** sin. Elihu longed to see Job get back on track. He wanted him to see God as He truly is; A God of Grace, Goodness, and Greatness.

God is Gracious (Chapter 33)

Elihu begins by reminding Job that he has nothing to fear from him, for he is just a mortal man the same as he. He does not use flattering words in order to impress anyone, and his desire is to be impartial (**32:21-22**). He simply wants to speak the truth as The Spirit of God has led him.

"My words come from an upright heart, and my lips speak with sincerity what they know. The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of The Almighty gives me life. Refute me if you can. Prepare your case against me; take your stand. I am just like you before God: I was also pinched off from a piece of clay. Fear of me should not terrify you; no pressure from me should weigh you down." **Job 33:3-7**

Right away we can see a difference in Elihu's approach. He doesn't wish to "beat Job up", but rather, he wishes to "lift him up". Elihu wants to lovingly correct Job. He realizes that he has been treated with contempt by his friends and that more of the same is the last thing that Job needs. But, that doesn't mean that Job didn't need some correction. In his suffering and subsequent torment subjected to him by his companions, Job had become a bit self righteous and even insinuated to some degree that he is the only one who is blameless in this entire matter. Job believed that God had not acted as justly as He should have. Job is incorrect in his assumptions of God's sense of fair play, and He does need to be called out on it. Elihu wants to restore him gently (**Galatians 6:1**).

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by The Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you may also be tempted." **Galatians 6:1 (NIV)**

Elihu claims that it is The Holy Spirit that has prompted him to speak, and based upon the sincerity of his approach, all the while considering Job's feelings, I am inclined to agree with him. He wants to remind Job that God is not the unsympathetic bully that Job has accused him of being. God, in fact, is gracious, and everything that He allows us to endure is for our benefit.

It is obvious that Elihu has listened intently to Job's lengthy speeches, for he reminds Job of the things that he has said almost word for word. So many people in this world hear the words of others, but they rarely *really* listen to them. Job cannot claim that this is true of Elihu. He has carefully considered everything the Job has said, and he wishes to reprove him for his own good. I find it interesting that this young man comes across as the wisest of the group, although he has far less life experience. These men should have been Elihu's teachers, and yet, here he was at the front of the class. I am reminded here of The Apostle Paul's words to Timothy:

"Don't let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." **1 Timothy 4:12**

In stark contrast to Job's three friends, who said that Job's suffering had been meted out as punishment for his sins, Elihu explains that God sometimes uses suffering to actually keep us from sin. God uses harsh things to teach us and make us better. He does this because of His grace. Job was a righteous

man, but this didn't mean that he did not have anything to learn. Elihu thinks that there is something to be gained from Job's horrible suffering.

Elihu reminds Job that although it may seem to him that God is silent, God is always speaking in an effort to teach us, if we will but put forth the effort to listen:

"Why do you take Him to court for not answering anything a person asks? For God speaks time and again, but a person may not notice it." **Job 33:13-14**

C. S. Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." While Job had accused God of being silent, it is Elihu that suggests that God has actually been teaching Job a lesson all along, he simply had not been "tuned in" enough to hear. Job's suffering had indeed exposed a bit of dross among the precious metal of his righteousness. Job believed that he was actually better than he was, and God had exposed this flaw in his otherwise good character. As the old saying goes, "hard times will either make us better, or bitter." Job is a good man, but God wants to make him a better one. Jesus said it this way:

"Every branch in me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit." **John 15:2**

Now, I don't know about you, but being "pruned" doesn't sound like a lot of fun, but it is necessary for those who want their lives to bring glory to God. Pruning is God's way of making us better. It is because of His grace, that He cares enough to help us become more like Himself. Elihu reminds Job that God is for him and that he does have a "Mediator", Who is standing up for him in his trials.

"If there is an angel on his side, one mediator out of a thousand, to tell a person what is right for him and to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom,' then his flesh will be healthier than in his youth, and he will return to the days of his youthful vigor. He will pray to God, and God will delight in him." **Job 33:23-26a**

Do you remember a few chapters back, when Job longed for a mediator between God and man? Well, here He is mentioned again. His name is Christ Jesus, and because of His grace and mercy toward us, we too can be spared from going down to "The Pit". Our God cares deeply for us. He longs for us to be mature, lacking nothing. So, we must persevere when going through trials.

"Let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." **James 1:4**

Do not be disheartened when trials come. You have a Mediator who stands up for you. You have Christ Who wants to finish the good work that He started in you. Hard times are not always about God's judgment, but rather, they are often about the pruning process. God wants to speak to us in our pain, to teach us things that we did not know about our own flaws and weaknesses. He does this, not to be cruel to us, but rather, because of His wonderful grace.

God is Good (34-35)

Job had said some pretty harsh things about God's fairness. Elihu wanted to correct them. He understood that Job was in the midst of incredible suffering, but he took offense to Job's insinuations in regard to God's personal character. There is none who possesses more goodness than God, and Elihu attempts to set the record straight.

“Let us judge for ourselves what is right; let us decide together what is good. For Job has declared, ‘I am righteous, yet God has deprived me of justice. Would I lie about my case? My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.’ What man is like Job? He drinks derision like water. He keeps company with evildoers and walks with wicked men. For he has said, ‘A man gains nothing when he becomes God’s friend.’”
Job 34:4-9

Now let’s be clear here. Job hadn’t said all of that specifically, but he had certainly insinuated that there seemed to be no real benefit in being God’s friend. Job had used the example of all the times that he had seen the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer to make the case that there was no real benefit in righteousness. And He absolutely **did** say that God had deprived him of justice (**Job 27:2**). Elihu wanted Job to take these words back. He was offended that Job had given the appearance that He himself was good, and yet God somehow was not. Elihu’s objections are well founded, for if God is not good then life is hopeless, for it is He Who has complete control of the universe.

“Indeed, it is true that God does not act wickedly and The Almighty does not pervert justice. Who gave him authority over the earth? Who put Him in charge of the entire world? If He put His mind to it and withdrew the spirit and breath He gave, everything living would perish together and mankind would return to the dust.”
Job 34:12-15

Elihu was in essence saying, “Job, if it weren’t for the goodness of God, you and I wouldn’t be standing here talking right now. We are alive, thanks to God’s goodness. He alone, as Creator of all there is, has every right to do what He thinks is best.” He goes on for the remainder of the chapter to make his case that God has the right to do what He pleases, and what He pleases is always right. And furthermore, it is Job who has “no right” to question His goodness (**vs. 10-37**).

After this, Elihu says something that I find to be incredibly profound.

“Do you think it is just when you say, ‘I am righteous before God?’ For you ask, ‘What does it profit you, and what benefit comes to me, if I do not sin?’ I will answer you and your friends with you. Look at the heavens and see; gaze at the clouds high above you. If you sin, how does it affect God? If you multiply your transgressions, what does it do to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him, or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects a person like yourself, and your righteousness, a son of man.”
Job 35:2-8

Now, **that** my friends is some deep stuff! Elihu is explaining to Job and his buddies that they really aren’t doing God any favors by being sinful, or righteous, for that matter. God will still be God regardless of what we decide to do! His goodness is not tarnished in the least because of my own personal choices. I know lots of people who think that they are doing God some kind of huge favor just by going to church on Sunday! The fact is... that seeking after righteousness benefits **us**, not God! If we choose to sin, then we do it to our own detriment. If we choose to follow in the paths of righteousness, then we choose good for ourselves, as well as, those around us. Either way, God... will be God. Job had not done God any favors by being righteous. He had simply chosen to follow the right path, and God in His gracious goodness had richly blessed him for it. We would do well to remember the fact that God has given us the opportunity to choose good over evil, and we are the sole beneficiaries of the choices we make.

“See, today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity.”
Deuteronomy 30:15

If we choose wisely, then we will share in the God’s goodness. But if we choose the ways of sinfulness, then we will also reap what we have sown. The choice is up to us. But don’t think for a moment by choosing the path of righteousness that you are doing God some kind of favor, and that He

owes you something in return. He doesn't get a free toaster oven when I don't sin! He already has everything, I am the one in desperate need of Him. It is I that owe Him, and not the other way around. Can I get a witness? God has always been, and shall always be, good! When we start to doubt it, we should remember to take a good long look at the cross. What more does He need to do for us to prove His goodness?

God is Great (36-37)

In the final section of Elihu's sermon, he reminds Job and his friends that God is great. His mighty power is like no other. He alone is in control of the entire universe, and every aspect of His creation bows before Him, and Him alone. And yet, this great God is concerned with the ways of mankind and longs to see us choose the right path. In spite of our sin, He wants us to find forgiveness and blessing. He longs to teach us His ways, and there is no other teacher like Him (36:22).

Job had foolishly demanded for God to come down and speak to him, as if he had the right to call upon God's presence like that of a personal servant. Elihu reminds Job of exactly to whom he is speaking:

"No one can even look at the sun when it is in the skies, after a wind has swept through and cleared the clouds away. Yet out of the north He comes, shrouded in a golden glow: awesome majesty surrounds Him. The Almighty—we cannot reach Him—He is exalted in power!"
Job 37:21-23a

I LOVE those verses! What Elihu is saying is, "Job, you can't even look directly at the sun, are you sure that you want to look into the face of The Everlasting God and tell Him how unfair that you think He has been to you?" What a great image! I have heard so many people in my life say that when they meet God face to face, they are gonna march right up to Him and ask why he let this and that or such and such happen. Those people are sadly mistaken. When we finally see Him face to face, let me tell you what we all will do (with all do respect to the popular song "I Can Only imagine"), we will fall down upon our faces and worship the Almighty, Everlasting God. We will only be able to stand before Him when He takes us by the hand and lifts us to our feet, saying in that gentle voice of His, "Fear Not". And then, we will stand in his presence... We will stand... in awe. For he is Gracious, He is Good, He is Great.

And let All of **His** people say... **TRUTH!!!**