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Sermon Notes

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Elihu Speaks

Job 32-33

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a new voice speaks... a man known as Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram (Job 32:2). Honestly, those words teach us almost nothing, because we don't know any of those names.

Up until this point, we had no idea this man even existed... let alone that he had been there all along, listening to the dialogs between Job and his three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

To make matters stranger, he has five full chapters to make his points – a very long stretch of time; he has effectively four speeches to make over those five chapters... and after he is done speaking, God shows up and speaks to Job directly out of a whirlwind... and never mentions Elihu at all. He will mention and deal with the three friends. But not Elihu!

It's like these five chapters were just inserted into the narrative at some point.

However, as we've said again and again... the human speakers and author is not as important as what God the Holy Spirit intended by giving us these timeless words. It is best to take it at face value and not try to outthink ourselves... Elihu was a younger man who had been sitting there with Job and the three friends listening to the whole series of dialogs, and now wanted to speak up.

However, it goes much deeper than that... because this man Elihu will make some significant contributions to the topic of human

suffering and the character and plans and purposes of God. And today, in his first of four speeches, he will say that God uses suffering to benefit his people.

I. Elihu Prepares to Speak

A. Why Elihu Was Angry (32:1-5)

Job 32:1-5 So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. ² But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. ³ He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. 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.

1. This is a powerful example of righteous indignation... or holy anger
2. It offends him that Job sees himself as righteous and God as unjust... Job, it seemed, was more certain of his own righteousness than he was of God's justice
3. And that made Elihu very angry
4. The text says he was also angry at the three friends for not defending God's honor
5. According to Elihu, they should have either successfully proven Job's wickedness or stopped condemning Job
6. At the end of this message, I will talk about the rightness but also the limitations of righteous human anger

B. Why Elihu Waited to Speak (32:6-7, 11-12)

Job 32:4 Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he.

Job 32:6-7 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.'

1. There is a significant amount of honor here, given how passionate Elihu is
2. Our culture very much reveres the YOUNG and BEAUTIFUL and ENERGETIC and STRONG... not the aged and experienced and wise
3. We would do well to learn respect for older people from Elihu
4. BUT the time for Elihu's silence has come to an end!!

C. Why Elihu Is Now Compelled to Speak (32:8-20)

1. God Gives Understanding to Every Man (32:8-10)

Job 32:8-10 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.

All true wisdom comes from God, and God's actions in both creating all men and teaching them makes any human being a possible conduit of God's wisdom... everyone is worth listening to!

Some people are wise from a very young age... Jonathan Edwards was something of a spiritual prodigy, like a Mozart when it came to theology and the Christian life. By age 19, Edwards wrote out his famous resolutions, which show a depth of knowledge of eternity that is breathtaking:

Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration.

So... a young man can come to a high level of wisdom by the grace of God. And Elihu has some very good things to say, because God has instructed him by his Spirit!

2. Job's Friends Are Wrong to Give Up (32:12-16)

Job 32:12-16 not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments. 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?

Elihu is frustrated that these older men have given up AND that their arguments have been weak and ineffective. These men seem to hope God will refute Job... they have nothing more they can say!

3. So Now It's MY TURN! (32:17)

Job 32:17 I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know.

4. And I Can't Hold Back Any Longer (32:18-20)

Job 32:18-20 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.

Have you ever felt like that? You have something you desperately want to say, and it can't wait any longer

Jeremiah was like this!!

Jeremiah 20:9 But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

D. Elihu's Commitment: No Flattery (32:21-22)

Job 32:21-22 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

Elihu's zeal for the glory of God means that he will not flatter anyone, no matter how great that man might seem to be... Job was a wealthy, powerful man; but Job has spoken wrong things

about Almighty God... and Elihu must give greater place to God than to any man

E.Elihu Addresses Job Directly, Asking for a Hearing (33:1-7)

Job 33:1-2 "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.

1.He promises Job that he is upright in heart

Job 33:3 My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know.

2.God's Spirit is at work in him

Job 33:4 The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

3.“I am just a man, like you are”

Job 33:6 I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay.

4.So you should not be afraid of me like you would be of God

Job 33:7 No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you.

5.SO... listen to me and answer me now if you can!

Job 33:5 Answer me then, if you can; prepare yourself and confront me.

SO... effectively all of Job 32, and then these first seven verses of Job 33 are just preparation for Elihu to speak

II.Elihu's Criticism of Job (33:8-16)

A.Both Job's Friends and Job Himself Have the Same Theology

1.The Law of Sowing and Reaping Alone Can Explain Suffering

a.The friends: “God is justly punishing you, Job, for your secret wickedness!”

b.Job: “I have no such secret wickedness, so God is unjust.”
(33:8-11)

***Job 33:8-11 "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.'***

c.Elihu has a different perspective on the reasons for Job’s
suffering... and he is zealous for the glory of God

2.Focusing on Job: Elihu is angry that Job claims to be pure and that
God is unjust

B.But God Is Infinitely Majestic... So All Accusations of God are Wrong
(33:12)

***Job 33:12 "But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than
man.***

This has been one of our greatest lessons from the Book of Job... it is
always wrong for the suffering to accuse God of doing wrong

God is perfect, holy, high above the heavens... we are of the dust of
the earth; so on what basis can we humans rightly evaluate the
actions of God and find fault with him? EVER???

C.Two Great Accusations: God is Unjust, God Is Silent

1.Job’s accusation of the injustice of God is what really angers Elihu

2.BUT he addresses first God’s supposed silence

***Job 33:13 Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's
words?***

Job has repeatedly charged God with silence:

Job 19:7 "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response

Job 30:20 "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer

D.Elihu asserts: “God Is Not Silent!”

Job 33:14-16 For God does speak-- now one way, now another-- though man may not perceive it. 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

God fills the world with his word...

He speaks in creation, yes...

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

but God also speaks directly to the hearts and ears of human beings

Something pops into man's mind, and it was God speaking to him;
sometimes he speaks by dreams when people are sleeping

And WHY does God speak? Here it is time for Elihu's powerful contributions on the theology of suffering

III. Elihu's New Insights: God Uses Suffering to Save His People (33:16-33)

A. God's Use of Suffering to Benefit His People

1. Job/friends are all operating from the perspective of a God who only uses suffering to express his wrath and judgment for specific sins committed
2. But Elihu sees a different possibility... a more redemptive answer
3. God uses suffering to help us in life—to avoid sin and judgment in the future

B. God Uses Warnings (33:16)

Job 33:15-16 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

1. Turning from Wrongdoing (33:17)

Job 33:17 to turn man from wrongdoing

2. Turning from Pride (33:17)

Job 33:17 and keep him from pride

3. Salvation of the Soul from the Pit (33:18)

Job 33:18 to preserve his soul from the pit

4. Salvation of the Life from the Sword (33:18)

Job 33:18 his life from perishing by the sword.

Summary for the moment... God in his grace WARNS people ahead of time... he reveals his judgments and causes terror to fall on people so they will NOT DO EVIL THINGS... like in Genesis 20, when Abraham and Sarah were in Gerar, and Abraham lied about her and said she was his sister, and Abimelech was about to take her and marry her. God spoke to Abimelech in a dream and terrified him saying "You are a dead man, because this woman is a married woman." Abimelech said "I am INNOCENT! I didn't know!" Listen to what God said to him:

Genesis 20:6-7 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."

Elihu says God does this... he speaks to men in dreams and terrifies them and warns them and keeps them from sinning

God also uses dreams and direct communication to keep men from PRIDE... to humble them and help them realize God's infinite glory and majesty and holiness.

Now, Elihu doesn't mention the clearest way God speaks, and that is in his written word. It is for this reason that many think the Book of Job is so old... that it predates the Books of Moses. Because the clearest speaking God does is in his Scripture:

Psalm 19:7-8 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

C. God Uses Sickness

Elihu then turns to the terrible sickness that Job is experiencing... saying God uses it as well to help his people, to humble them, to chastise them for their sins, but to the end of bringing them to a deeper, sweeter, more intimate relationship with God

1. Sickness described (33:19-22)

Job 33:19-22 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.

2. Yet God can heal... using an angel as a mediator (33:23-24)

Job 33:23-24 "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'--

3. Complete healing and restoration (33:25)

Job 33:25 then his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth.

4. Through prayer and God's restoring work (33:26)

Job 33:26 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.

D. Resulting in Intimacy with God and Deeper Joy (33:26)

Job 33:26 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.

E. AND Powerful Ministry to Others (33:27-28)

Job 33:27-28 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.'

F.Summary: God Often Does This to Save His People (33:29-30)

Job 33:29-30 "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.

G.Now Job... I Have Yet More to Say (33:31-33)

Job 33:31-33 "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."

So... Elihu has brought a powerful and helpful perspective on God's purpose in the suffering of his people

God's purpose is to WARN people of their sins... to turn them away from paths of sin that will lead to the PIT (eternal judgment) or the sword (temporal judgments). In this God is very kind! He warns us ahead of time to repent lest we perish.

God also uses sickness to humble us and chastise us for our sins, then he heals us in answer to prayer... restoring us to full health and to an even greater intimacy with God than we ever had before. This is exactly what will happen to Job, though Elihu doesn't know it yet!

IV.God's People Humbled and Healed in Christ

A.All Roads Lead to the Cross

- 1.Again and again, we have seen the questions of the Book of Job are best resolved in the person and work of Christ
- 2.Elihu has a shadowy picture of God's purpose in suffering, of the warnings, and of how God speaks... because all the Old Testament's wisdom is as a shadow compared to Christ

3. Yes, God speaks in dreams and whispers in our ears... but how can we know if they truly were God's words or our own imaginations?
4. God spoke more clearly in the Prophets... beginning with Moses, then with all the writing prophets that followed—Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel
5. BUT God has spoken most clearly and finally in his Son

Hebrews 1:1-3 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

B. The Difference Between the Sufferings of Christ and the Sufferings of His People

1. Elihu is right that God's purpose for the sufferings of his people are wider and deeper than the Law of Retribution... "You reap what you sow"
2. But the highest purpose of suffering in history was that of Christ
3. Whenever we sinners suffer, we know we are getting a small portion of justice for our sins, for the wages of sin is death
4. But Christ suffered as a sinless substitute... drinking in the darkness of the PIT... of hell itself... to free us from condemnation

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

C. Afflictions Lead Us to the Cross to Be Humbled... and Healed

1. So, now that Christ has suffered and died in our place, we know our lives have been redeemed from the pit
2. All our suffering is then redemptive... to humble us and to bring us again and again to the cross for healing

1 Peter 2:24-25 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls

We are prone to wander... sickness and suffering helps humble us and heal us and make us hate sin

These are the greatest lessons of these two chapters, and Elihu's remarkable appearance and speech

But there are a few more lessons we can glean

V. Timeless Lessons from Elihu

A. The Reality and Limits of Righteous Human Anger

1. Human anger is usually toxic... James calls it moral FILTH:

James 1:20-21 man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

2. Usually our anger is CARNAL... based on selfish interests and pride
3. But occasionally, we can be righteous in anger... like Elihu, we can get angry when God's name is slandered or God is mocked or Christ is insulted... or God's laws are flouted
4. Sometimes righteous anger is linked to moral injustices we hear that humans do to each other... like abortion or racism or economic exploitation... sex trafficking... child abuse... etc.

5. It is right for us to feel holy anger in these situations and be zealous for God and his purposes... to use our words and actions to be salt and light in the world and stamp out evil whenever we see it
6. This is RIGHTEOUS... and we should ask God to give us more zeal and passion like Elihu—especially for the honor of God and of Christ
7. BUT let us be careful... our passions are so corrupt that what starts as holy anger can quickly become polluted with other themes—pride, virtue signaling... proving to the watching world “I am a good person... I get angry at injustices!”
8. The year 2020 was a year of full display of so-called “righteous indignation”... many of our fellow citizens displayed all kinds of what they thought was righteous rage when they rioted after George Floyd’s death... or when they stormed the Capital building after Trump’s defeat... if you see all the rage in social media connected with all the hottest current events of the day—Black Lives Matter, COVID, the election, racism, sex abuse and the “Me Too” movement... and many of those enraged in no way claim to be Christians, but are openly proud of their rage and their moral superiority... we can and should become mistrustful even of righteous anger in a righteous moral cause.
9. So let us ask God to purify our hearts and imitate Jesus
10. Jesus gave the most perfect displays of righteous anger in history; when he patiently made a whip and then drove out the moneychangers and their animals from the holy house of God, it was remembered “Zeal for your house will consume me!” Let us seek to have such a zeal for the glory of God!
11. Ask God to work perfect, holy anger in you... but continue to distrust your corrupt heart

B. God Both Wounds and Heals

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.

1. Elihu shows that God is directly active in bringing sickness to his people for good purposes... not merely to judge us for our sins
2. God wants to make us know him better... to show his face to us and bring us joy

Job 33:26 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.

3. One of the greatest purposes of God is HUMBLING us, and sickness does that

Job 33:17 to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

4. Know that all sickness is temporary!! In heaven, it will be gone forever

Revelation 22:2 On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

C. The Need for God's Discipline for Sin

Hebrews 12:5-6 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

D. The Powerful Ministry of the Suffering

2 Corinthians 1:4 God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.