

The Man With All The Answers

Job 32:1-22

Introduction

We come to a new section and a new speaker. His name is Elihu. He will denounce Job for making a claim of innocence and he will denounce Job's friends for failing to persuade Job of his guilt. Elihu bases his argument on the fact that God does not condemn unfairly or unjustly. Elihu believes Job is arrogant in his belief of personal innocence and personal righteousness.

This presents a kind of conundrum for the reader. We know God does not condemn unfairly or unjustly. We also know that God considers Job righteous. We also know that Job is suffering great trial. In the next few chapters we are introduced to a self confessed angry young man. His anger seems to stem from the others failure to have an adequate or sufficient answer to persuade Job of his guilt before God.

Elihu has listened to the arguments and responses of Job and has thought long and hard over the issue of suffering. Some dodge the question all together by suggesting suffering is an illusion. But repeated pain, tragic accidents, abusive relationships, disease, war, and profound loss all point to a real problem. Whether the suffering is slight or annoying; or profound and life changing; we all want answers to suffering. Job is a believer. Job wants to know about the loss of his children, the loss of his fortune and the loss of his health. Job is afflicted with a horrible disease, painful and it appears terminal. To make matters more complicated Job had been living a life of worship, trust, obedience and love for God.

Elihu's argument is largely based on the idea that God uses suffering to help people turn away from sin and turn to the Lord. The young man claims the right to speak (vv.1-22) and makes a fervent plea for Job to hear what he believes is the truth (33:1-7). Elihu will lay out three charges against Job (33:8-13); an error must be corrected and a picture of God using suffering to motivate and arouse people towards repentance; but Elihu will come to the same solemn charge as the others; repent and be justified (33:31-33).

Remember Job has acknowledged God's power (chapter 26); and questioned God's justice (chapter 27); and sought God's wisdom (chapter 28); reflected on his past life of peace and joy (chapter 29); evaluated God's judgment (chapter 30); and looked forward to God's justice (chapter 31).

Elihu listened patiently. He knows what everyone has said (except God)! It's easy to think we have the answers when we have listened to everyone (except God). Elihu is the man with all the answers!

Elihu's speech is long (six chapters). Wiersbe thankfully outlines the speech this way:

1. God is speaking through me (Job 32; note v.8)
2. God is gracious (Job 33; note v.24)
3. God is just (Job 34-35; note 34:10-12)
4. God is great (Job 36-37; note 36:5, 26).

Elihu will approach the problem from a little different tact; his goal is not to prove that Job was a sinner; but rather that Job's view of God was wrong. Elihu is going to suggest that God sends suffering; perhaps not simply to punish sin; but to keep us from sinning (33:18; 24); and to make us better people (36:1-15). Wiersbe point out that Paul the Apostle would have agreed with Elihu (2 Cor. 12:7-10) that God does sometimes send suffering not necessarily for sin—and the writer of Hebrews would agree that suffering does in fact sometimes keep us from sin (Hebrews 12:1-11).

Elihu will claim the right to speak because he is angry; because he has shown respect and deference to his elders; because he is inspired and has understanding by God's Spirit; because Job's friends have been unable to prove him wrong; this compelled him to speak; and because he himself is impartial and fair; not willing to flatter anyone or tolerate flattery from someone.

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The Right To Speak When The Conversation Stops (v.1)

Job 32:1–22 (NKJV) So these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.

Job has stopped talking. He has rested his case. Job has made an oath to God and his friends that he is not guilty of grave sin. Job has challenged God to vindicate him or pass sentence on him. Wiersbe: “The trial has gone on long enough, and it was time for the Judge to act” (see p. 121).

Job’s answer has shocked Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar into silence. How could Job speak so boldly to God about God? They must have thought that God’s judgment was the next thing on God’s agenda. But God silent. No response. No fire. No resolution.

There’s a famous story about an event that took place at London’s Hyde Park at a place called “The Speaker’s Corner”. Anyone can get on the soap box and say whatever. A man came and ridiculed God and Christianity. He got on the box and said, “If there is a God, I will give Him five minutes to strike me dead!” He took out his watch and after five minutes smiled and said, “My friends, this proves there is no God!” A Christian believer in the crowd called to him and said, “Do you think you can exhaust the patience of God in five minutes?”

We have all had conversations about various subjects where there is silence.

The Right To Speak When We Are Outraged (vv.2-3)

2 Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job; his wrath was aroused because he justified himself rather than God.

This is Elihu’s pedigree or genealogy. Buz was the nephew of Abraham (see Genesis 22:21). Name—father—region—family. Elihu means “My God is He”—and speaks of a spiritual heritage. Son of Barachel—meaning ‘God blesses’; suggesting a prosperous and aristocratic family; from the land of Buz—brother of Uz; the forefather to Job. The names are significant; Job and Elihu share a common ancestor; and Elihu is of the family of Ram; which has in part roots in the family or tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:19); some scholars suggest that Elihu—has a kind of rudimentary Jewish or Hebrew theology. Some scholars suggest that Elihu brings to the table a heritage that the three friends lack; Elihu like Job—share a common ancestry, spiritual heritage, aristocratic position and Judaeen roots (if the book is given a late date).

Is Elihu a peace-faker; peace-breaker or peacemaker?

The expression “the wrath of Elihu was ‘aroused’ or kindled—burning.

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Elihu claim his anger is justified. He is angry with Job; because Job sought to justify himself rather than God. He is angry with the others (Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz); they claimed Job's suffering was due to sin—but they could not prove Job a sinner. In Elihu's mind Job may have started out—not sinning—but was now sinning by accusing God of injustice. Elihu correctly observes that Job sought to defend himself at God's expense. The friends could see no other reason for Job's suffering other than sin—and Job could see no reason for his suffering other than God was treating unfairly or unjustly!

In Elihu's mind Job was wrong and the other three were wrong! This will be the focus of his argument. Some would suggest that Elihu is raging against the world (McKenna; p.226). But is that true?

3Also against his three friends his wrath was aroused, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.

Three times we read about “the wrath of Elihu” and “his wrath” (v.2); and now “his wrath was aroused once more”; and again in verse 5.

So what is all this anger? Elihu is angry that the three friends have failed to refute Job; he is angry with Job for claiming God is wrong and that the three friends have no answer to prove Job wrong. Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz have stopped logging on; and they have pretty much consigned Job's fate to God (vv.12-13).

The friends have pronounced guilt without evidence; and Job's anguished cry of why—has gone unanswered.

Wiersbe quotes Aristotle; “It is easy to fly into a passion—anybody can do that; but to be angry with the right person to the right extent and at the right time with the right object and in the right way—that is not easy, and it is not everyone who can do it”.

The Right To Speak Having Listened To All Sides Respectfully (vv.4-7)

4Now because they were years older than he, Elihu had waited to speak to Job.

5When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was aroused.

6So Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said: “I am young in years, and you are very old; Therefore I was afraid, And dared not declare my opinion to you.

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7I said, 'Age should speak, And multitude of years should teach wisdom.'

There are several things happening; Elihu waits because he is young. Elihu is angry because he can't believe the conversation has come to a close. Elihu's speech begins in verse 6; in the ancient world it was considered inappropriate for youth to express opinion or interrupt elders. Most people believe that with age comes wisdom.

The Right To Speak And The Appeal To Understanding And Inspiration (vv.8-10)

8But there is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.

9Great men are not always wise, Nor do the aged always understand justice.

Here great means 'old'.

We would hope with age comes wisdom; but sometimes age simply brings entrenched long term wickedness and rebellion. Someone said 'there are old fools as well as young fools'.

10"Therefore I say, 'Listen to me, I also will declare my opinion.'

Elihu is speaking to Job and the three friends. Can the Spirit of God speak to young and old alike? The answer is yes. The Spirit of God can bring understanding; and Elihu claims he to has been given wisdom and understanding in spite of his youth.

The Right To Speak When All The Other Speech Seems Inadequate (vv.11-15)

11Indeed I waited for your words, I listened to your reasonings, while you searched out what to say.

Elihu claims that he has listened carefully, intently; he has weighted their arguments (listened to their reasonings);

12I paid close attention to you; And surely not one of you convinced Job, Or answered his words

The rather bold claim is—your arguments have been unpersuasive—evidenced by Job's rejection of the arguments and Job's response. No one has answered Job's situation or sufficiently or persuasively refuted Job's statements or proved Job wrong.

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13Lest you say, 'We have found wisdom'; God will vanquish him, not man.

Or—you have claimed wisdom—but now you have given up; and you are leaving God to answer Job.

14Now he has not directed his words against me; So I will not answer him with your words.

Elihu claims he will speak and he will not repeat their arguments but will come up with an original argument.

15“They are dismayed and answer no more; Words escape them.

Elihu basically says that the friends are confused, amazed and overwhelmed by Job. They have failed to refute Job and have stopped talking; they have nothing more to say.

The Right To Speak Based On Compulsion (vv.16-20)

16And I have waited, because they did not speak, Because they stood still and answered no more.

17I also will answer my part, I too will declare my opinion.

18For I am full of words; The spirit within me compels me.

One commentator makes the sarcastic remark; “Elihu spoke no truer words than when he said he was ‘full of words’” (see Robert L. Alden; New American Commentary; Vol. 11; p.320).

We are still listening to Elihu’s introduction!

19Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins.

Elihu had been waiting a long time to speak. He feels like if he doesn’t say something he is going to explode! We are all familiar with the story in the New Testament of the Old wine in New wineskins or new wine in old wineskins. In the process of fermentation the grapes produce gas that inflate the wineskin; and if the skin is dry or brittle or old it will break (see Matt. 9:17).

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In order to address the issue if Elihu is full of ‘gas’ he would say—no—this is the Spirit of God compelling me to speak’. Elihu believed he had a mandate from God to tell everything he knew about the subject. Again Wiersbe offers this delicious insight; “Little did he know that, when God finally appeared on the scene, He would completely ignore Elihu and all that he said” (see p. 125).

Why is that important? Because not everyone who says they are led by the Spirit or directed by the Spirit are in fact led and directed by the Spirit. This is one of the reasons we must ‘test the spirits’ to see whether or not they are from God (I John 4:1).

20I will speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer.

The Right To Speak Without Bias (vv.21-22)

21Let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone; Nor let me flatter any man.

Fox News did not invent the concept of fair and balanced.

Elihu claims that his opinion is unbiased and neutral. In a sense Elihu is claiming that he can serve in the role of mediator.

The thought of course is that all other opinions offered are fraught with bias.

22For I do not know how to flatter; Else my Maker would soon take me away.

Elihu claims to fear God’s judgment against flattery.

In a sense Elihu is making the claim that some of the previous arguments have been offered not so much to lay hold of truth—but rather to come to the conclusion that my argument or opinion is the one that reflects wisdom or sense or sanity.

What makes a claim of neutrality believable?

Conclusion

Elihu claims the right to speak because he is indignant (angry); inspired (God is speaking through me); and impartial (who could be more fair than me?); and impelled or compelled (vv. 16-20).

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These are high claims! Elihu basically says; lets approach the problem a little differently. Let's speak by God's Holy Spirit; let's speak passionately and justly (see McKenna p. 232).

What are the dangers?

Do you think that Elihu was a thoughtful young man who thought he was doing Job a favor; or a spiritually smug, self-righteous man who thought that God's Spirit had given him insight and wisdom into a difficult situation?

What happens when a person pretends to possess spiritual insight or wisdom about things?

We must all be on high alert. Is it possible that we can come off as a know it all or super spiritual know it all?

What happens when people perceive as smug or self-righteous? When we appear more dedicated, more godly, more mature, more deserving, more privileged, more religious, more reverent, more virtuous, more wise, more sincere, more in tune to God, more pleasing to God?

I watched a documentary entitled Losing God where a young man relates the story of two people in his church who had so called 'words of wisdom' that were wholly disconnected from the person's heart and experience. The person was a closet atheist, an unbeliever—who even though he looked like a believer and talked like a believer and went to church like a believer—who claimed to have accepted Christ, claimed to have been filled with the Spirit, claimed to have diligently sought—and found—and then lost faith! In the process of losing faith—he bitterly claimed that people came to him with so called messages from God—when in fact—he was in the pit of despair—wondering if he should verbalize and articulate his own profound unbelief!

The person who claims to know things they don't know can often do more harm than good.

Is it possible that a person can fool himself or herself into believing they are saved when they are in fact not saved?