

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Job isn't primarily a story about a man who went from riches to rags to riches again. It is a story about how God relates to His servants. God allowed Satan to attack Job in order to prove that Job served God because he loved God. After Job lost his family and his fortune, his wife suggested he curse God and die. But Job refused to curse God or blame God for his troubles. Then three of his friends dropped by to try to help him. Rather than comforting Job, they exacerbated his pain by accusing him of some terrible sin that earned him his suffering. Most of the book is devoted to a cycle of conversations Job had with Zophar, Bildad, and Eliphaz. But in Job 32, we discover there is another character who had been standing by and listening to their conversations. His name was Elihu.

Job 32:1-10. “So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.

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. I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say: Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know.’”

Throughout this series I've shared with you artistic scenes from Job's life. The English artist, William Blake, included a scene in which Elihu can be seen speaking to Job.

Besides, age, there was an important difference between Elihu and the other friends. In Job 33:2-4 Elihu said, “I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know. The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” The Hebrew word for “breath” is *ruach*—it is the same word for Spirit. Zophar, Bildad and Eliphaz all expressed their personal opinions about why Job was suffering. Elihu was young, but he spoke under the leadership of the breath of God, the Spirit of God. Youth is a relative term, so Elihu might have been in his 20s or 30s.

There's more wisdom in a Spirit-filled young person than in older people who expresses their own opinions. For instance, there were two employees in a certain business who applied for a promotion. One employee had worked for the company three years and the other had been there fifteen years. When the younger worker got the promotion, the older employee complained to the boss, “How could you give the promotion to him? I've got fifteen years of experience and he only has three.” The boss said, “You don't really have fifteen years experience. You've got one year's experience fifteen times.”

Hopefully as we grow older, we grow wiser, but that doesn't always happen. Wisdom comes

from God—age only seasons it. Because he was speaking by the Spirit of God, Elihu expressed more wisdom than the other three friends combined. He made three amazing and accurate observations about God.

1. GOD IS MORE GRACIOUS THAN WE DESERVE (JOB 33:22-33)

The arguments of Zophar, Bildad and Eliphaz expressed the belief that people basically get what they deserve. To them, God was an unflinching judge who meted out His punishment during this lifetime. Good people deserve good treatment and bad people deserve bad treatment. Job was suffering; therefore Job *must* have been a bad man.

But Elihu countered their argument by saying God is gracious. Beginning in Job 33:22 Elihu shares the plan of salvation. He told Job, "His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death." Like all people, we are sinners who deserve death and hell. All of us draw near to the pit, or hell. Elihu mentioned the pit four times in these few verses.

He continues in Job 33: 23-25: "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, to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him—then his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth.'" This reference to an angel could mean a human messenger. The Hebrew word for angel is *malachi*. I believe Elihu was the messenger God sent to share the truth with Job. He told Job God is not an unflinching judge—He is a gracious God. God's message to lost mankind is that a ransom has been paid for sinners so we don't have to go down into the Pit of destruction. When we accept the benefits of the atoning death of Jesus Christ, it's like being born again! Or as Elihu expressed it, it's like being restored as in the days of his youth.

Next, Elihu tells us what we must do once we have heard God's message of grace. Notice 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." First, you must learn that you are a sinner and deserve death and hell. But then, when you hear that through God's grace He has provided his Son to pay the ransom for your sins, your response is to pray to God and seek His forgiveness. Once you receive His forgiveness by grace, then you will be filled with so much joy you'll want to shout!

To see the next phase of personal salvation, read Job 33:27-30. "Then he comes to men and says, 'I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. [that's what grace is] He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.' God does all these things to a man—twice, even three times—to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him."

Did you follow that progression? You hear the message of grace, and then you respond by receiving God's free gift of grace, then you will want to tell others about God's grace. Your testimony will be "I sinned, and I didn't get what I deserved!"

Salvation is by grace. Some people are running around complaining because they don't think they are getting what they deserve. You'll never hear me say that! I believe that I *deserve* death

and hell. I *deserve* to spend eternity separated from God in the pit of destruction. I *deserve* this because I have sinned against a Holy God. I don't want what I deserve, I need God's grace. I need God's mercy. I need God's forgiveness. Here's a good definition of grace: God giving me what I need rather than what I deserve.

Salvation is a gift—you can't earn it or buy it. The Bible says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2: 8)

There's nothing you can do to deserve grace. Imagine you invited Cindy and me into your home for dinner. We come to your home and enjoy a delicious meal along with wonderful conversation and fellowship. Then, it's time for us to leave, and as you're standing at the door to say goodbye, I reach in my pocket, pull out a dime and place it in your hand. Then I say, "I enjoyed the meal. I'm sure it cost you a lot of money, so I want to pay you this dime for the food we ate." What an insult that would be! I would never something so rude because I would be insulting your gracious hospitality and kindness.

How insulting it must be to God when He offers us the free gift of salvation by grace, and yet people still try to earn their way into heaven. Elihu was right on target. God is more gracious than we deserve.

2. GOD GIVES US JOY IN OUR DARKEST HOURS (JOB 35:9-10)

There are some precious nuggets of gold that often lie hidden within the pages of your Bible. One of the most valuable verses in all of God's Word can be found in Elihu's words in Job 35:9-10: "Men cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?'"

Can you relate to that? Are you suffering under a load of oppression like Job? The natural reaction when we suffer is to cry out for relief. We want to say, "God, take away my pain! I need relief!" We want God to remove the unpleasant circumstances, but Elihu says during our deepest darkest pain, we should look for God. He is the One who gives us songs in the night. I want you to meditate on that phrase for a moment. Notice the season—the night. Night is the time when the darkness reigns and our fears and worries seem magnified. We all fear those things that go "bump in the night." Those things are often our fears and worries that bump around in my mind during the night. Those who struggle with depression understand the meaning of going through "the dark night of the soul."

But in addition to the season, think about the song. A song speaks of joy and peace. The good news is that whenever you struggle with the darkest time in your life, God can give you a song to lighten your heart.

I have an eclectic taste in music. I enjoy a wide variety of genres. God is the creator of music; some people have just stolen it to communicate a false message. For instance, I enjoy listening to music by Enya, even though she's the queen of New Age music. A few years ago I was listening to a song she recorded called "How can I Keep from Singing?" It contained the phrase "songs in the night" so I suspected it was an old hymn. I did some research and discovered it was a hymn

written by Robert Lowery in 1860. It’s a great song. The words say: “My life flows on in endless song; Above earth’s lamentation. I hear the sweet though far off hymn; That hails a new creation: Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear its music ringing, It sounds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing? While though the tempest loudly roars, I hear the truth, it liveth; And though the darkness ‘round me close, Songs in the night it giveth. No storm can shake my inmost calm, While to that rock, I’m clinging. Since Love is lord of heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?”

It’s a nice, peaceful song and Enya does a good job, but she changed some of the most important words to fit her New Age belief. She sang “I hear the truth it liveth:” but the original words say: “The Lord, my Savior liveth;” In the next line Enya sang, “Songs in the night IT giveth:” and the original words say: “Songs in the night HE giveth.” In the next stanza Enya sang, “Since LOVE is Lord of heaven and earth.” The original song said, “Since CHRIST is Lord of heaven and earth.”

Truth doesn’t give you songs in the night—God does. Love is not Lord of heaven and earth—Jesus is Lord! Once you understand that truth, you *can’t* keep from singing, even in the darkest night of your life.

It’s easy to sing when everything is going great. But God promised to give us a song when our circumstances are difficult. A great example of this can be seen in the Book of Acts. While they were in Philippi, Paul and Silas were arrested and severely beaten. Then they were thrown into the deepest part of the dungeon with their feet constrained in stocks. It was midnight in the prison. They were bleeding and facing a possible execution. What would you do? Here’s what Paul and Silas did according to Acts 16:25-26: “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose.”

God gave them songs in the night, just as Elihu said. There is a twofold blessing to the songs God gives in the night. First, these songs give us a sense of peace and joy. Second, when you sing the songs in the night, you’ll discover you are set free from the fear and worries that bind you. God really does give us songs in the night. Are you listening? Are you joining in with the song that He is putting in your heart?

3. GOD IS GREATER THAN WE CAN COMPREHEND (JOB 37:14-24)

The last thing Elihu teaches us about God is that we don’t have the mental competence to understand the works and way of the Almighty God. He says in Job 37:14-18, “Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God’s wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge? You who swelter in your clothes when the land lies hushed under the south wind, can you join him in spreading out the skies hard as a mirror of cast bronze?” Those words remind me of the praise chorus that says, “God of Wonders beyond our Galaxy, You are Holy, Holy.” Not only does God reign beyond our Galaxy, He is also beyond our ability to understand. We tend to think we’re pretty smart, but Elihu reminds us that while we’re down here sweating,

God is painting His next original sunset.

Then he says in Job 37:19, "Tell us what we should say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness." If intellect is compared with brightness, God is the sun and we are the dimmest bulbs in the drawer. You can try looking directly into the sun, but you'll injure your eyes doing it. In the same way, you can try to stand on the same intellectual level as God, but you'll find it impossible. Elihu continues in Job 37:21-24. "Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?"

Elihu sounded like a spiritual meteorologist as he appealed to Job to consider the amazing mystery of weather. Today, we have radar and satellite images to forecast and track the weather, but we basically haven't advanced any from Job's day in that we can't *control* the weather. As somebody has said, "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody ever DOES anything about it!" Even today, only God can control the weather. And Jesus says He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

I remember hearing a humorous story about a preacher in Kansas who arrived back in town after a storm. A dishonest businessman, who lamented that his house had been blown away by the tornado, met him at the train station. The preacher said to the man, "That should teach you that God always punishes sin." The man said to the preacher, "Oh really? And did you know that your house was also blown away by the storm?" The preacher paused and said, "That teaches us that the Lord's ways are beyond our understanding."

Perhaps Elihu used the weather as an illustration of God's greatness because he could see a storm brewing on the horizon. As Elihu was talking about God's greatness, the storm struck and another speaker interrupted Elihu. We arrive at the climax of the story beginning in Job 38:1. Job had been asking God a multitude of questions and heaven was silent. Finally, God spoke. But God didn't deliver a set of clean, concise answers to Job. Instead, God starts asking Job a few questions of his own. In summary, God was saying: "Job, I'm in charge of this universe. I've heard all your questions, and I'll answer your questions when you answer mine." Then God proceeded to ask Job 65 questions—none of which Job could answer correctly.

Are you struggling with questions today? Maybe you've lost your job and you're asking, "Why?" Perhaps you are struggling with cancer or some debilitating pain and you're wanting to know, "Why, Lord?" Maybe you heard about the young pastor in Waco who was electrocuted while baptizing last Sunday and you want to say, "Why? God? Why, with all the wicked sex offenders running around did this young pastor die?"

Like Job, you can ask your questions. Just don't expect to receive nice, clear, concise answers. His greatness is beyond our comprehension. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

CONCLUSION

If God had delegated creation to me, I would have done things differently. I would have created a world where there is no disease or accidents. I would have created a world where there are no killer hurricanes, no terrorism, no babies born with congenital defects, and pastors would never be electrocuted while they are baptizing. There would be no germs and viruses, no spiders or mosquitoes.

But wait—God *did* create a world like that didn't He? But he also created something extremely powerful: Human choice. He gave mankind the option to be cruel and unkind, or to be loving and kind. He didn't create us as zombies or robots who would automatically bow before Him and love Him. When mankind chose to sin, we unleashed a horrible chain reaction of natural and accidental evil into the world.

That's what the story of Job is all about. Job possessed the ability to *choose* to love God, even in the midst of His pain. If Job only loved God when things were going well in His life, that love would not have been real. But Job faced more suffering than any of us will ever endure, and *still* he chose to love God.

God didn't cause these evils to come upon Job any more than He has caused you to suffer. God doesn't inflict evil. But during the most painful times of our lives, God speaks to us in a way that is louder than any other time in our lives.

The Christian intellectual C.S. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Problem with Pain*: "We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities, and anyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (*The Problem of Pain*, Chapter 6)

What was God shouting to Job? He was shouting, "Even in your pain, don't lose your HOPE in Me." And Job had said, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him!" God was shouting, "Job, even with your unanswered questions, trust Me!" And Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end I will see Him."

God is trying to shout something to you as well. He is saying, "As bad as your life becomes, don't forget that my Son, Jesus, suffered and died to bear your sins." He is saying, "Even in your confusion and pain, I love you. I care for you. I love you so much that I sent my One and only Son to die for you. If you will believe on Him you will never perish, but you will enjoy eternal life." Can you hear Him?

OUTLINE

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2. GOD GIVES US JOY IN OUR DARKEST HOURS (Job 35:9-10)
3. GOD IS GREATER THAN WE CAN COMPREHEND (Job 37:14-24)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes