



Job - Chapter Thirty Three

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.d Job 32:1-37:24 - Elihu: Suffering as a Discipline (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Three

Elihu opens and closes this section with a call for Job to listen to his words and answer if he is able (vv. 1-7 and vv. 31-33). He then presents a summary of Job's contentions regarding himself, his circumstances, and God's apparent silence (vv. 8-13) before suggesting ways that God speaks in order to turn a person from the way that leads to death (vv. 14-30).

II.d.ii Job 33:1-33 - Elihu Rebukes Job

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ 'But now, hear my speech, O Job,
and listen to all my words.

Job 33:1

But now, hear my speech, O Job. Elihu again demonstrated his gift for speaking without saying much. These first seven verses of the chapter are mainly a wordy, windy introduction.

Elihu frames his rebuke with a call for Job to **listen** to his **words**, which he likely sees as serving to fill the silence left by Job's friends as well as to explain how God may be speaking on the very points where Job has claimed he is silent, as did Isaiah: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*>> (Isaiah 45:15).

- 2 See, I open my mouth;
the tongue in my mouth speaks.
- 3 My words declare the uprightness of my heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.
- 4 The spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Job 33:2-4

See, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks. Elihu appears to be evoking Job's earlier statement where he declared that, as long as he had breath, his lips could not speak falsely by agreeing that his friends were right; refer to Job 27:2-6. Elihu plays on Job's words, as he also did in Job 32:8, to assert that what he has to say is equally an upright and sincere declaration.

The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Here also the touches of pride that marked Elihu and many young men since him. He was anxious to demonstrate to Job and to the three friends of Job that he was just as good, just as spiritual and just as wise as they were. Indeed, it can be said that Elihu thought of himself as just a little better, spiritual and wise as Job and his three friends. He believed that he could be an affective spokesman for Job before God, even as Job had cried out for before: <<For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both>> (Job 9:32-33).

It is important that the reader should not miss the facts that age often brings more experience but not necessarily wisdom as people do not always learn from their experiences. Also, the young often show wisdom beyond their experiences and age. The younger generation should listen to their elders but should show discernment in what is being said. Likewise, the older generation needs to understand that youth can have wisdom and understanding and should similarly seek to discern what they are saying.

- 5 Answer me, if you can;
set your words in order before me; take your stand.
- 6 See, before God I am as you are;
I too was formed from a piece of clay.
- 7 No fear of me need terrify you;
my pressure will not be heavy on you.

Job 33:5-7

No fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy on you. Elihu wanted to assure Job that he had nothing to fear from his offer to be Job's spokesman before God, i.e. see, before God I am as you are. He is also saying that God does not discriminate and treats all people equally based on the merits of their heart and not on age, gender, race, etc.

Throughout history there have been some people who seem to be exalted above others yet they are only men in the sight of God. Paul and Barnabas were perceived as gods by the Lystrians yet they had the wisdom and faithfulness to deny it: <<*Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them*>> (Acts 14:15). James points out that even the great man of God Elijah was simply a man doing the Lord's work: <<*Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth*>> (James 5:17).

- 8 'Surely, you have spoken in my hearing,
and I have heard the sound of your words.
- 9 You say, "I am clean, without transgression;
I am pure, and there is no iniquity in me.
- 10 Look, he finds occasions against me,
he counts me as his enemy;
- 11 he puts my feet in the stocks,
and watches all my paths."

Job 33:8-11

Surely, you have spoken in my hearing. Elihu claimed to have listened to Job carefully and now reported what he says he heard. He said that Job claimed to be pure, to be without transgression, to be innocent and sinless. Even Job's wife thought that Job held on to his integrity for too long: <<*Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die'*>> (Job 2:9).

This means that young Elihu had not heard Job carefully. Although Job did strongly and rightly argue that he was a generally godly man who was blameless and upright he did not claim to be sinless or without transgression. Job certainly knew that he was a sinner in a general sense and could not be considered righteous compared to God:

- <<Therefore my words have been rash>> (Job 6:3b).
- <<Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?>> (Job 7:21a).
- <<How can a mortal be just before God?>> (Job 9:2b).
- <<Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse>> (Job 9:20).
- <<For I know you will not hold me innocent>> (Job 9:28b).
- <<For you write bitter things against me, and make me reap the iniquities of my youth>> (Job 13:26).

Therefore, despite Elihu's claims to the contrary, he did not accurately hear Job. He perhaps heard the sound of his words but he did not listen carefully to the meaning and context of Job. There are many people like Elihu who hear but do not listen!

Elihu summarises Job's statements as if Job had argued that he was pure and with no iniquity. However, it is clear from Job's regular practice of making burnt-offerings that this was not his claim (refer to Job 1:5), which was focused instead on denying the suggestion that some hidden sin was at the root of his suffering. By mischaracterising Job's plea, Elihu ends up offering a similar argument to that of the three friends: God is greater than man (v.12) and thus he must have intended to warn or rebuke Job (vv.14-30).

Look, he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy. Here, Elihu was more faithful in explaining the mind of Job. Job did sometimes feel that God regarded him as an enemy and had in a sense imprisoned Job. Yet Elihu misunderstood Job's feelings because he put it in the context of Job's claim to sinless perfection. When Elihu put the true claim of Job's sense that God was his enemy next to the false claim that Job said he was sinless, it made the claim that God was his enemy seem even more inaccurate and actually ridiculous.

He puts my feet in the stocks. Elihu quotes Job verbatim; refer to Job 13:27. God had made Job his enemy, pursuing him like a leaf driven in the wind: <<Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a windblown leaf and pursue dry chaff?>> (Job 13:24-25).

12 'But in this you are not right. I will answer you:

God is greater than any mortal.

13 Why do you contend against him,
saying, "He will answer none of my words"?

14 For God speaks in one way,
and in two, though people do not perceive it.

15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on mortals,
while they slumber on their beds,
16 then he opens their ears,
and terrifies them with warnings,
17 that he may turn them aside from their deeds,
and keep them from pride,
18 to spare their souls from the Pit,
their lives from traversing the River.

Job 33:12-18

But in this you are not right. I will answer you: God is greater than any mortal.

Young Elihu again spoke in his wordy, imprecise way. It certainly was true that God is greater than humans and, indeed, all else, but that did not mean that Elihu could or should answer Job especially in the way that he did. Yet Elihu made a strong connection between the two in his own mind.

As stated above, God is of course greater than everything else: <<For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts>> (Isaiah 55:8-9). David therefore poses the question: <<what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?>> (Psalm 8:4).

Why do you contend against him, saying, “He will answer none of my words”?

Here Elihu spoke the truth. Like many young men he was somewhat proud and too confident in his own wisdom and analysis; yet at the same time he was certainly correct on some points. He was correct in telling Job that God did not owe him or anyone else an explanation for what he does and that Job was wrong to demand such an explanation from God. God does what he chooses because he is God: *<<But the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness>> (Isaiah 5:16).*

For God speaks though people do not perceive it. Elihu is suggesting that Job has not recognised and maybe even has ignored the ways in which God has spoken to him. Elihu’s thought here is that perhaps God had spoken to Job already but Job did not perceive it. It could have been through a dream or through a vision of the night that God warned Job to repent for he sparers their souls from the Pit, but Job was not paying attention.

Adam Clarke saw a distinction between a dream and a vision of the night: “Visions or images presented in the imagination during slumber, when men are betwixt sleeping and waking, or when, awake and in bed, they are wrapped up in deep contemplation, the darkness of the night having shut out all objects from their sight, so that the mind is not diverted by images of earthly things impressed on the senses.”

Elihu repeatedly states that the purpose of God’s speaking to people in the way he describes is to spare their souls from the Pit. Thus he implies that Job’s suffering may be a corrective of his overall path rather than simply punishment for some hidden sin. However, given the Lord’s description of Job in the prologue in Job 1:8 and 2:3, Elihu’s suggestion seems very similar to, if not an even more severe condemnation than, the one offered by the three friends.

- 19 They are also chastened with pain upon their beds,
and with continual strife in their bones,
20 so that their lives loathe bread,
and their appetites dainty food.
21 Their flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen;
and their bones, once invisible, now stick out.
22 Their souls draw near the Pit,
and their lives to those who bring death.

Job 33:19-22

They are also chastened with pain upon their beds, their flesh is so wasted away, their souls draw near the Pit. The images that Elihu employs in this section are surely aimed at encouraging Job to see his similar physical state as signifying that God has spoken mercifully through his circumstances, to keep him from the path he was on (v.18).

The idea given here is that God chastises his people to correct them and bring them back onto the correct path: <<Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you>> (Deuteronomy 8:5). The apostle Paul alludes to something that was troubling him and the solution to his problems: <<Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with

weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong>> (2 Corinthians 12:7b-10).

Elihu had just suggested that God spoke to Job in a dream; now he suggests that perhaps God spoke to him through his physical suffering. Charles Spurgeon commented, “The chastisement of sickness and the flagellation of pain whip the sinner back to him who alone can save him. These are the black dogs of the Great Shepherd wherewith he brings back wandering sheep till they come again under his crook, and he leads them into green pastures.”

- 23 Then, if there should be for one of them an angel,
a mediator, one of a thousand,
one who declares a person upright,
24 and he is gracious to that person, and says,
“Deliver him from going down into the Pit;
I have found a ransom;
25 let his flesh become fresh with youth;
let him return to the days of his youthful vigour”;
26 then he prays to God, and is accepted by him,
he comes into his presence with joy,
and God repays him for his righteousness.
27 That person sings to others and says,
“I sinned, and perverted what was right,
and it was not paid back to me.
28 He has redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit,
and my life shall see the light.”

Job 33:23-28

Elihu poses a hypothetical situation in which an angel or a mediator might act on behalf of a person to deliver him (vv.23-25), and he suggests that the appropriate response would be repentance and rejoicing (vv.26-28). When Elihu tells Job that he should not fail to accept the correction because of <<*the greatness of the ransom*>> (Job 36:18b), he implies that the loss of all of Job’s possessions and family might be such a ransom for his deliverance (v.24).

Charles Spurgeon commented, “Jesus Christ is indeed a blessed mediator. A mediator must understand two languages. Our Lord Jesus understands the language of God. Whatever are the great truths of divine intelligence and infinite wisdom, too high and mysterious for us to comprehend or even to discern, Christ fully understands them all. Moreover, Jesus understands our language, for he is a man like ourselves, touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and smarting under our sicknesses. He can read whatever is in the heart of man, and so he can tell to God the language of man, and speak to man in the language of man what God would say to him.”

He is gracious to that person. In the view of Elihu, if Job would only receive and respond to God’s messenger, if he would only admit to God’s uprightness, then he would be restored to God’s favour:

- He would receive God’s grace (He is gracious to that person).
- He would be rescued from destruction (God would deliver him from going down to the Pit).
- He would be healed (let his flesh become fresh with youth).
- He would see his relationship with God restored (he prays to God, and is accepted by him, he comes into his presence with joy, and God repays him for his righteousness).
- He will repent before men (that person sings to others and says, “I sinned, and perverted what was right”).

This shows that Elihu’s argument is really just the argument of the three friends of Job, merely restated and delivered with new energy. The message is: “Job, the problem is that you are a sinner and are blaming God. If you would give glory to God and repent, everything would get better.”

29 ‘God indeed does all these things,
twice, three times, with mortals,
30 to bring back their souls from the Pit,
so that they may see the light of life.
31 Pay heed, Job, listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
32 If you have anything to say, answer me;
speak, for I desire to justify you.
33 If not, listen to me;
be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.’

Job 33:29-33

God indeed does all these things twice, three times, with mortals. Elihu wanted Job to understand that God was in fact being very patient with Job. Job felt that God was being harsh and treating him like an enemy; Elihu wanted Job to appreciate what he understood to be God's longsuffering towards Job.

Scripture explains how the Lord directs the lives of individuals: <<*Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed*>> (Psalm 139:16), <<*The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps*>> (Proverbs 16:9), <<*All our steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can we understand our own ways?*>> (Proverbs 20:24), <<*I know, O Lord, that the way of human beings is not in their control, that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps*>> (Jeremiah 10:23), <<*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified*>> (Romans 8:28-30), <<*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone*>> (1 Corinthians 12:4-6), <<*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will*>> (Ephesians 1:11), and: <<*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*>> (Philippians 2:12-13).

Be silent, and I will teach you wisdom. Perhaps Job stirred to respond to young Elihu; perhaps the older suffering Job simply rolled his eyes at the younger man. Whatever Job's reaction, Elihu felt the need to tell Job to be silent and felt he had to assure Job that he would teach him wisdom - as if Job could not judge for himself whether Elihu's words were wise.