

Job 32-37

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 October 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] So, Job 32 to 37. I don't know if you've got time to read it this afternoon. It's enigmatic Elihu.

! Enigmatic Elihu. As you read it, or as you read it this week, I think as it begins, you expect something prophetic.

Expect something important. He's a new character on the scene. And why do you expect something prophetic? Well, because his speech is where they are. They're placed in the book. Because he claims as much.

So, if you get the end of chapter 31, you've got the words of Job are ended. Kind of dramatic. And then Elihu begins to speak, and he says in chapter 36, verse 2, he says, Bear with me, for I've got something to say on God's behalf.

Claiming to be a prophet. He claims to speak for God. But I think the question with Elihu is, does he? And that is a question that greatly puzzles Job's scholars.

[1 : 11] What about Elihu? Is he good? Is he bad? Or is he ugly? Or is he some in between?

And Job's scholars from Calvin have taken one view. He's bad. You have other views. Kind of most of the modern comedians want to say he's good. Most of the modern sermons I've listened to this week have kind of wanted to say, how Elihu is good?

It's a difficult question because in chapter 42, God sorts everything out, doesn't he? In the book of Job. And God offers no rebuke to Elihu. He does to the other two friends.

Job offers no sacrifice on Elihu's behalf. And so that's led many modern scholars to say, well, everything he says must be right. Does that mean God approves of this speech?

We're not told. Does it simply mean that God is overlooking this man's offense, just as Job was covering over his children's sins? It leaves us to wonder. We wonder whether none of what he says is right, some of what he says is right, all of which he says is right.

[2 : 25] Is he just a long-winded, arrogant buffoon who's pushed onto the stage at the end of the drama for some kind of comic relief? Or is he a wise prophet?

Or is he something in between those two extremes? Well, here's my take. Elihu himself, he wants us to believe that he's some kind of Joseph. A young Joseph.

In the way that he speaks, he wants us to think, ah, this man is like a young Daniel who offers up wisdom. Wisdom that is from God. Only after all the other wise men have offered up their wisdom and failed.

He thinks he's like Daniel. I think he's a bit more like Jonah. Why? Why do I say that? Why is he like Jonah? Because he's angry.

He's an angry young man. And in his arrogance, Elihu wrongly assesses, I think, the prophetic situation that he's been placed in.

[3 : 25] But, even though I think he is arrogant, and even though I think he's angry, and even though I think he wrongly reads the situation, he nevertheless speaks the word of the Lord.

In other words, Elihu is not a false prophet, but he's certainly a flawed prophet. And so I want to share with you, I think, the oddest sermon outline I've done in a very long while. And so my first point is where I find Elihu wanting.

And my second point is what I like about Elihu. And so where I find Elihu wanting. Elihu is eccentric. And so there's four negatives. And there's twice as many negatives as positive.

Elihu is eccentric. And he's angry. Most modern commentators want to claim that Elihu can do no wrong. And I think that's wrong.

And I want to show you why that's wrong. So here is what he's wanting in Elihu. Let me give you his first floor. Okay? So his first floor is this. He speaks from anger. He speaks from anger. Now, we all

know, don't we, there's such a thing as righteous indignation.

[4 : 32] Righteous indignation is a biblical concept. I'll admit, whenever I get angry with my wife or children, I can always manage to squeeze that anger into this theological category.

Love, it's a righteous anger. It's a right anger that you're hearing right now. More seriously than that, we know Jesus, he himself got angry, didn't he? He cursed the fig tree. And we know he took out the whip.

He cleansed the temple. You can hear, bouncing off the walls, his woes to the scribes and Pharisees. And I can only imagine some righteous indignation went with those words.

But that doesn't mean, when we read here in chapter 33, verses 1 to 5, well, just look with me and see. It's quite shocking, isn't it?

Verse 2. It doesn't mean that Elihu's anger was righteous.

[5 : 43] It wasn't. when he spoke out of anger he said things like this he said what man is like Job who drinks up scoffing like water and so in the Psalms and the Old Testament you do not say and in wisdom literature you do not say that somebody was a scoffer that is as low as it gets so remember Psalm 1 does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or right at the bottom the worst thing could be sit in the seat of scoffers that's not Job it's a big insult to give in the Old Testament he says of Job that he travels in the company of evildoers that he walks with wicked men not only are those accusations false in the book but Job never mocks God Job never scoffs at God he never derides God he certainly isn't hanging around with the wicked not only are those remarks wrong they're actually mean and what is also mean and I believe arises out of

Elihu's unbridled anger are his kind of stringent words to Job look at chapter 35 verses 12 to 16 here's basically what he says he says basically there's no point of contact between you Job and God Job you don't make any difference to God and God doesn't make any difference to you and that is basically what he says there it is harsh and it is inconsiderate anger over the years in presbytery I've been on various committees sometimes when churches have had conflict and there was one church that I do some work with with an elder who lost his temper in an elders meeting he lasted for two hours anger just he vented I met with him three months later with another elder we asked him what happened he kept it together for another ten minutes and then he vented again off he went he said

I regret nothing of what I said just the way I said it and off he went you've not seen how hot his anger still was don't be like that the tongue is a fire and if you don't know it as James tells us the tongue is a restless evil it is full of deadly poison don't let it burn your brothers and sisters Proverbs says a man of wrath stirs up strife and one given to anger causes much transgression Proverbs 29-22 so Elihu's first flaw is that he speaks from anger he should have cooled down before he opened his mouth Elihu's second flaw and I've struggled how to put this Elihu's second flaw is his pleading to be cured is annoying it's annoying what am I saying what I'm saying is he reminds me of the child in class you know those child children who raises his hand for every question straight away every question that's ever asked he puts up his hand and says pick up pick me pick me pick me and it's fine that they raise their hand for every question but it's the oh oh oh oh oh oh that goes along with it

I must speak I must speak Elihu says that I might find relief I must open my lips and answer must you later he'll say if you have understanding hear this listen to what I have to say he likes to say that pay attention oh Job listen to me I'm quoting him so look with me Elihu look with me chapter 32 and see it 32 verse 10 listen to me let me also declare my opinion look at verse 20 I must speak that I might find relief I must open my lips and answer verse 33 verse 1 but now hear my speech oh Job listen to all my words behold I open my mouth you can look at verse 31 you can look at verse 33 you can look at 34 2 you can look at 34 10 you can look at 34 16 he wants to be listened to in fact chapter 32 is a bit ridiculous it's fine to tell us

Elihu you won't speak because you're so young I respect that I respect that you respect your elders fantastic very proverbs appropriate but don't take half a chapter to tell me how much you respect your elders just talk get to the speech please stop saying things like I will share I will answer with my share I will also declare my opinion just give me your opinion enough with the synonymous parallelism just talk it's a bit like house group isn't it you know the person in house group can I just ask a question can I just ask a question ask the question don't ask to ask the question ask the question alright now to be fair once we get to chapter 33 we've got the meat of the matter no wait a minute we don't so look at chapter 33 in verse 1 but now hear my speech and listen to all my words

and that is followed isn't it behold I open my mouth the tongue in my mouth speaks ah the tongue in your mouth that's the one that's going to speak

[11 : 32] I was thinking it might be the tongue in your shoes no it's the one in your mouth listen a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold on a setting of silver proverbs 25 verse 11 but with many words comes much sinning people treat long windedness and excessive talking like it's a generic treat and it might be but it also might be a sin when words are many proverbs 10 19 when words are many transgression is not lacking but whoever restrains his lips is prudent and so what D.L. Moody said of prayer I think we can also say of speech some men's prayers need to be cut short on both ends and set on fire in the middle and Elihu has more chapters in the book of Job than Eliphaz Bildad and Zophia combined I know that his words were set on fire because Proverbs 17 verse 2 tells us whoever restrains his word has knowledge he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding and Elihu didn't have a cool spirit he was a hothead that's the first flaw and the second flaw is that he's got lots of words he multiplies words his pleading to just hear him is annoying at least it is to me the third flaw is that when he finally opens his mouth not only is it long winded but often it's arrogant it's arrogant not only does he talk to Job in front of the others he says things like this Job empties his mouth with empty talk hey guys Job opens his mouth with empty talk you know what I'm talking about he multiplies words without knowledge and he follows that kind of talk with things like this

I have something to say to Job on God's behalf or you have something to say on God's behalf he says Elihu I will get my knowledge from afar so he says Job remember he's saying to Job Job you know the God who's in heaven who who is not talking to you and is not communicating with you well Job is speaking to me and what does the Lord say well the Lord says what Elihu says indeed as Elihu puts it in chapter 36 verse 4 for truly my words are not false he says one who is perfect in knowledge is with you he's saying that for himself one who is perfect in knowledge is with you what an honor to be in your presence Elihu he says earlier to Job be silent Job and I will teach you wisdom he's arrogant brothers and sisters a word of advice

I think we need to be very careful of our God talk of your God talk God has told me to say this to you that kind of thing the kind of thing says I had this confirmed as I was reading my Bible the Lord has told me we mustn't hide our pride under the pretense of prophecy so it would be interesting to do this study on people who leave churches and we've not had many people leave the church quite a lot left in the first year but we've not had many people leave the church let me tell you what they say should I tell you what people say when they leave churches we just feel that God is moving us on we just feel

God is calling us to serve in another place we just feel called by God to another ministry now you know what I'm talking about I think that comes very near to taking the name of the Lord your God in vain so if you leave don't tell me you're leaving because God told you to tell me the truth tell me you're leaving because you're bored tell me you're leaving because you don't like me or you don't like some of the elders tell me you're leaving because the church around the road has got a better worship band better youth group better coffee if that was possible don't lie to me don't lie to us and certainly don't bring God into your life to justify it and you know and I will know much much worse than that are people who come to Christians and go to Christians who are terminally ill with cancer and tell them that God would heal them if they just had faith that people have had a word from the! [17 : 07] the cancer will be gone by the end of the week by the end of the month it's such a rubbish it's devilish so be careful when you speak for God Elihu's first floor was that he spoke from anger his second floor was his pleading to be heard which was annoying his third floor is getting worse he's often arrogant when he spoke for God and the fourth floor is that!

his accusation is off so his accusation is off Eliphaz Bildad Zophar they claimed that Job's suffering was caused by his sin Job sinned and that was the cause of his suffering Elihu claimed that Job had sinned in the suffering slightly different he'd sinned in the suffering in other words Job had sinned in what he had said about God and to God and so Elihu has got a kind of retribution theology that's quite similar to the other three guys that's why he often sounds quite like them let me give you two examples chapter 34 and verse 11 he says therefore hear me you men of understanding far be it from God that he should do wickedness and from the almighty that he should do wrong for according to the work of a man he will repay him and according to his ways he will make it befall him that's kind of retribution theology chapter 36 and verse 11 you'll see that he promises health and wealth and happiness to those who listen to

God's instruction so 36 verse 11 if you listen and you serve him you'll complete your days in prosperity and your years in pleasantness so Elihu is the B side of the same record for all his protesting I've got something new to say Elihu's view of how life works with God is not actually different from the other three Job is suffering so he must have sinned he must have sinned he's just the B side to the same record the B side is a little bit better than the A side but it's still scratched and it's still playing the wrong melody now why do I say that because Job did sin did he did Job sin in the way that he spoke of God and spoke to God did he sin before his suffering or did he sin in his suffering well there's two ways of answering that the first way you could answer that is you could go to chapter 42 which we'll come to in a few weeks and you'll see what

God says but that's too easy the second way you could do it is you could go through chapter 3 to 31 and you could look at all of Job's speeches and you could read them asking this question did Job sin against God in his speeches in his response was Elihu right and my answer is no Job openly complains therefore I will not restrain my mouth I will speak of the anguish of my spirit I will complain of the bitterness of my soul Job curses the day in which he was born in fact he wants God to finish the job he says oh that God would let loose his hand and cut me off he is somewhat suicidal he claims in really strong language that God is against him he says the arrows of the almighty are within me why have you made me your mark why have you turned cruel to me with the might of your hand you persecute me why do you count me as an enemy he questions the goodness and the justice of

God in the world why do you give light why do you give light and life to those who are in misery and he especially questions his own situation although you know I'm not guilty yet there is none to deliver me out of your hand and Job thinks that if only he was allowed a hearing before God that God would not contend with me in his great power no he'd pay attention to me I could argue with him I could argue with God my ways before his face and the result is I would be acquitted by my judge now I don't think Job sees perfectly straight but that's not the same thing as saying that Job didn't speak rightly so think so think about it tonight is it a sin to question God is it a sin to question God no of course not not always my God my God why have you forsaken me remember who said that is it a sin to complain against

[22 : 08] God and the answer to that is not always how long oh Lord the psalmist cries out and the saints in revelation around the throne they cry out about the martyrs how long oh Lord is it a sin for Job to say that God is against him without cause because Job hasn't given him any cause and God is in some sense against him so re-read the start of Job 1-3 it is the Lord who's given and it's the Lord who's taken away is it wrong for Job to ask for personal vindication no is it wrong to ask God to act justly no well what is wrong with Job speeches and I want to say to you nothing I don't think he sinned with his tongue what do you say what do the commentators say and the truth is I don't care I care what God says and so look come with me just quickly to

Job chapter 42 Job 42 and verse 7 and 8 where after the Lord had spoken these words to Job the Lord said to Aliphaz the Tamarite my anger burns against you and against your two friends for you have not spoken of me what is right here's the killer as my servant Job has at the end of verse 8 for you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has my anger burns against you who Job no who does God's anger burn against God's righteous indignation burns against Aliphaz Bildad Zophar their friends because you have not spoken of me what is right but my Job has my servant Job has Job has spoken rightly about God thus saith the Lord that settles it and so when I understand that that teaches me how to re-read the rest of the book not only with an open mind and with open ears but with open eyes to see what God would teach me through

Job's speeches about who God is and about how I can talk to him you see just because Job cannot find God it doesn't mean he doesn't know where wisdom should be found just because Job despairs of life it doesn't mean that he's denied the holy one just because Job thinks God is acting unjustly in his situation it doesn't mean that he can't recognize his own limitations and just because Job sounds so hopeless it doesn't mean that he can't also cry out to God though he slay me yet will I trust him he's so very human and so enough about righteous Job and back to enigmatic Elihu he speaks from anger he's annoying he's often arrogant and his accusation is a bit off now let me tell you the two admirable things here are the two admirable things what I like about Elihu first I like what he says about God speaking through suffering I like what he says about God speaking through suffering in 33 verses 14 to 16 Elihu tries to teach Job that God speaks in a number of different ways God speaks now one way now another way though no one can perceive it

how does God speak he's speaking through a prophecy he's speaking through conscience Job but also he might speak through a dream he says especially through nightmares because he says he opens the ears of men and he terrifies them with warnings how else might God speak!

well one final way through suffering God might speak through suffering and verses 19 to 33 there's a rebuke there isn't there verse 19 man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones that's what Elihu wants Job to perceive Elihu says God has not been silent you keep saying God is silent Job you won't speak to me but you're!

[26 : 34] Job he speaks through suffering you're just not listening and what Elihu wants Job to hear is he wants to hear the rebuke this is what God is saying in the pain God is disciplining you Job just a word of caution not every time you suffer is God speaking to you you stub your toe getting out of bed tomorrow morning don't think well what is God trying to teach me but God does speak through suffering in two ways one is personal isn't it one is personal and one is in salvation history so C.S.

Lewis in the problem of pain wrote these words God whispers to us in our pleasures he speaks to us in our conscience he shouts in our pains suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world and that's been many of your testimony but more importantly in salvation history the book of Hebrews begins like this long ago and many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by prophets but in these last days he spoke and dressed by his son how did he speak well the ultimate revelation the ultimate voice of God was the cross wasn't it in the sufferings of the son of God we hear God's voice we hear his voice you're forgiven you've been granted eternal life your sin has been taken as far as the east is from the west it's been crushed on the foot it's been buried beneath the sea it's been put behind!

God's back you sinner can be God's friend so I like what Elihu says about God speaking to us in his suffering but secondly I like Elihu's closing argument his fourth speech it's in 36 22 to the end and I don't think he wins the case but I do think what he says in this section is beautiful and brilliant he tells us that God is exalted in his power who's a teacher like him behold he scatters his lightning about him and he covers the roots of the sea it's a beautiful picture and God thunders wondrously with his voice he does great things that we cannot comprehend therefore can you just see it verse 24 what's the respond fear him fear him and so Elihu at the end of his speech shifts the focus from Job's problem to God's power God's power which is demonstrated in creation here's how John Goldingay summarizes Elihu's speech he writes this creation shows us that God is too big for us to be able to tell God how to run the world and it reminds us that we can hardly ever appear before God to ask such questions and offer God such advice and so if we can't look the sun in the eye which we can't how can we look God in the eye insightful people wise people focus on revering and submitting to God in the fear of the Lord rather than expecting him to show up and see him that's exactly right so despite Elihu's false allegations and his arrogance and his verbosity and his four flaws we need to rightly recognize that he does defend the justice of God and he leans us towards the fear of God and right after that the voice of

God speaks chapter 38 Elihu prepares Job as he prepares you and me the readers to hear from God in chapter 38 and what does God talk about much of what Elihu has just talked about in his false speech he talks about his majestic transcendence his inexplicable mysterious providence his absolute moral freedom that's what he talks about and in this way Elihu is a little bit like Elijah a figure like John the Baptist who is to prepare the way for the Lord he's almost in a way he's a bit like the burning bush he says to Job and he says to you and I it's time to take your shoes off because you are about to encounter in awe for the beauty of the flower or the garden or creation and awe before a glorious

[31 : 11] God and he calls Job and he calls you and I chapter 37 verse 14 wonderful verse for this week stop stop and consider the wondrous works of God stop and consider the wondrous works of God have you done that lately so that we might bow before our maker the awe awesomeness of creation should generate in us an awe inspiring awareness of God's greatness as you see what I like about Eli whose speeches are his theology of the cross and his theology of creation and he anticipates the combination of both those things namely the death of the creator how does Paul put it as we finish he puts it like this the one by whom all things were created in him all things hold together that one was reconciling to himself all things things in heaven and things on earth how by making peace through the blood of his cross a theology of creation and cross creation and cross I know that we might grasp the greatness of God let's pray