

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(October 27, 2024)

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: The Story of Our Lives...and God**

(Growing through Job's story)

#### **Good News from Elihu**

(Elihu, part 2, Job 32-37)

Study #9

#### **Introduction: A tough assignment - Be Elihu...**

Last week we looked at the life and ministry of Elihu.

Elihu was a young man who served as personal counsellor to Job. He did a wonderful job of giving Job wisdom and pointing Job to God. We learned from him last week and we'll learn from him again, this morning.

You're probably glad for that because there have probably been times when you have been talking with a friend, your friend is being honest with you, and you wanted to be Elihu in his or her life.

Those opportunities come to us all. When they do, we want to fulfill the role of "wise friend" like Elihu did with Job.

I was talking with a friend recently and realized that Elihu-like wisdom would be helpful. My friend was struggling.

The irony is that when this opportunity arrived, I was in the middle of this series of messages on Job (of all things), had seen how unhelpful Job's three "friends" were to him (I definitely didn't want to do what they did!), and was anticipating exploring the better help that Elihu would give.

With all that going on, to be honest, I struggled to find something helpful to say. We sat together, and there was a good bit of silence.

I finally said, *"What you're going through is something I've never had to face. I don't know quite what to say. But I'm here for you."*

Then I prayed. I went to battle in prayer for my friend.

There will be those times when your friend struggles. Life will deliver a devastating blow, and your friend will have a hard time keeping his head above water. He will wrestle with God and His ways.

They might look to you for help. When that day comes, what will you say? How will you help?

Today, you and I will listen and learn from Elihu. He spoke loving and true God-words to Job while he was in pain. May God use his words to teach us to do the same for ours.

*Review...*

We know all about Job's devastating losses of wealth, loved ones, and health. We also know the backstory to those losses. Job suffered because God allowed Satan to afflict him.

Adding to Job's pains were "friends" who proved to be very poor counselors. They defaulted to cruel accusation and cold explanation.<sup>1</sup>

And we have watched as Job has transformed. He was a God-fearing innocent sufferer. He became an ugly demander who required that his friends give him comfort, that his God gives him relief, and that a judge will give him justice.

By the time Job's speeches ended, he was demanding that God meet him, face to face, as in a courtroom, to hear his case. Job was confident that a judge would find him innocent of all charges, and that any judge would convict God of being a lousy Manager of the universe.

Enter Elihu.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Job called them *[16:2] miserable comforters*.

<sup>2</sup> There are different ways of viewing Elihu's contribution to the book of Job. If we view Job as a paragon of faithful endurance through suffering, then Elihu is an

What he says takes up six full chapters of Job's book (Job 32-37), which is more space than was given to any of the three friends.

In these chapters, Elihu actually gave four speeches.<sup>3</sup>

Elihu's purpose in the first speech, which was what we mostly looked at last Sunday (32:6--33:7), was to convince Job that he was for him. He was NOT against him.

He worked hard to be soft with Job to better enable Job to listen to what he had to say.

Elihu approached Job as a person, not as a project. He called him by name - Job - something that his three friends never did. And he was personally and emotionally present.

Today, if you and I would be helpful to our friends who are going through tough times, we would do well to follow Elihu's lead in convincing our friend that we're not out to get him / her.<sup>4</sup>

The last two speeches Elihu gave are extremely important - and we're not going to look at them.

The reason for ignoring them is that most of what Elihu says in speeches #'s 3 and 4 is repeated in God's speeches, to which we will turn next Sunday. And God says it so much better than Elihu does.

But, today, we will look at speech #2. In this speech, the time has come for Elihu to deal with Job's charges that God was an unjust and uncaring cosmic dictator.<sup>5</sup>

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angry, self-inflated gadfly who only intensifies Job's unjust suffering. If Job is a believer who has lost confidence in God's justice and care and has need to repent, Elihu becomes God's inspired spokesman and Job's longed-for mediator (9:33; 16:19; 19:25). This second way is certainly how I am viewing Elihu.

<sup>3</sup> Speech #1 - 32:6--33:7; #2 - 33:8-33; #3 - 34-35; #4 - 36:-37.

<sup>4</sup> Elihu repeatedly claimed that his words were inspired. (32:8, 18; 33:3-4; 36:2-4)

<sup>5</sup> Although Elihu has been speaking for some time now, he doesn't actually begin to rebut Job's arguments until 33:8.

Elihu is aiming to help Job with his understanding of WHO God is.<sup>6</sup> This is the central issue that any sufferer needs to address.

Who is God? Who am I in relation to this God? and how does who God is impact how I am to live in hard times?

All of us - suffering or not, counseling a sufferer or not - need to know "*...who art in Heaven.*"

During the course of his struggles and trials, Job had become confused. He lost focus on what he used to believe about God AND he had come to have a hyper-inflated view of himself.

Listen as Elihu gets into it with Job.

### **Re-cap: Job vs. God (33:8-13)**

#### **Job's Beef with God (vv. 8-11)**

***[33:8] "You have in fact spoken in my hearing,  
And I heard the sound of your words:  
[9] 'I am pure, without wrongdoing;  
I am innocent and there is no guilt in me.'"***

By this time, we don't deny for a minute that Job was a good guy. He did all sorts of good things for people in need.

But his claims ("*pure...without wrongdoing...innocent...no guilt*") are a stretch. He holds himself in too high regard.

Then, too, his accusations against God are unwarranted.

***[33:10] 'Behold, [God] invents criticisms against me;  
He counts me as His enemy.  
[11] 'He puts my feet in the stocks;  
He watches all my paths.'***

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<sup>6</sup> For Job to confidently accept Elihu's correction regarding how his own righteousness relates to God's absolute sovereignty and justice, he must first be convinced that God's purposes are redemptive.

Job wanted to hear somebody say, “Job, you’re right. You haven’t done anything wrong. God has made a huge mistake and I’m sure He’s going to tell you how sorry He is real soon.”

He won’t hear anything like that from Elihu.

### **Elihu’s Beef with Job for His Beef with God (vv. 12-13)**

**[33:12] “Behold, let me tell you, you are not right in this, For God is greater than mankind.**

**[13] “Why do you complain to Him That He does not give an account of all His doings?”**

And here, Elihu (for the first and not the last time) takes Job back to first principles. And the very First Law of the Universe is this: There is a God, and it is not you.

Further, God - being GOD - is not obligated to explain Himself or His ways to you or to anybody else. God doesn’t need Job’s permission - or yours or mine - for anything He might choose to do or to allow.<sup>7</sup>

But Job doesn’t only think that God is against him. He believes that God is distant, standoff-ish, removed. He sees God as uncaring. By this point in the story Job would have said, “Sure, there is a God. But He isn’t all that good, and He doesn’t much care about me.”

Elihu again tells Job that, “You’ve got it all wrong.” True, God doesn’t respond to our demands. But God is eager to let people know about Him and His ways. He communicates. He pursues.

### **God, the Great Pursuer (33:14-28)**

### **He Communicates (vv. 14-16)**

*Through dreams and visions*

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<sup>7</sup> Earlier, Job had repeatedly insisted that God justify His treatment of him. (7:20-21; 10:2; 13:3, 13-23; 17:3-5; 23:2-12; 31:35-37)

**[33:14] “Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, yet no one notices it.”<sup>8</sup>**

**[15] “In a dream, a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls on people,**

**While they slumber in their beds,**

**[16] Then He opens the ears of people, And horrifies them with warnings**

Far from being absent or silent, God creatively pursues and communicates. Sometimes, it’s through dreams and visions.<sup>9</sup>

God was active in those ways in the days of Job. He is doing the same thing today.

Especially in places where there is little or no Christian witness or access to Bibles, there are lots of stories of people coming to faith in Jesus through visions and dreams.<sup>10</sup>

When I was with Paul Lere in India in 2019 at an ITP workshop, I shared a meal with one of the Indian pastors. This pastor told me that most of the villages that convert to Christianity from Hinduism do so because of a miracle.

God will provide a healing or a drought-breaking rain. Or He will appear to someone in a dream or give someone a vision.<sup>11</sup>

That’s God communicating. God also communicates through His creation.

*Through creation, Scripture (chapters 36-37)*

A beautiful sunny day, a stormy night, a starlit sky, the vastness of the ocean, the starkness of the desert, the majesty of the mountains -

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<sup>8</sup> “Once or twice” = over and over and over again.

<sup>9</sup> Job 33:15-18.

<sup>10</sup> We read these reports especially of people in Muslim lands. See Ecclesiastes 3:11-15 - God’s communication may come through man’s conscience so as to keep him accountable to God.

<sup>11</sup> Chuck Sneesby, a missionary we have supported for decades, told me that a major way he saw Hindus in India come to faith in Jesus was through miracles and healing.

all of these declare God's amazing grandeur. And that's Elihu's theme in the fourth of his speeches.<sup>12</sup>

The truth is that God has always been a communicating, self-revealing God. He wants us to know about Him. Elihu points Job - and us - to this beautiful part of who God is.<sup>13</sup>

Further, Elihu says that far from being distant and uncaring, God protects people.

### **He Protects (vv. 17-18)**

He communicates...

***[33:17] So that He may turn a person away from bad conduct,  
And keep a man from pride;  
[18] He keeps his soul back from the pit,  
And his life from perishing from the spear.***

When God looks at the people He has created, He sees the objects of His love. He desperately loves you and me. More than that, ***"...God so loved the world..."*** - He loves everyone you know.

He loves us so much that He sent Jesus!

But when God looks at us, He also sees people with built-in leanings toward self-destruction. He knows that if we are left to our own devices, we will end up eternally lost, forever estranged from Him.

Elihu says that God wants us to choose life. So, he goes on to tell us that God gives us warnings.

In this age when we have both the Old and the New Testaments, we can find hundreds of warnings from God to avoid wicked ways that lead to ruin and to choose the path of life.

And prior to there being a written record, God gave - and He still gives - the good gift of conscience. Conscience is a God-given inner guide that shouts ***"Stop!"*** when we do what we know is wrong.

All of this says so much about the goodness of God. No power and no person forced God to warn us. But He warned us because of His great compassion. He is for us.

Elihu isn't finished. He goes on to expand Job's thinking about God's goodness with an unexpected word. He affirms that it is God who allows suffering.

In other words, ***"No, Job, God is not distant. In fact, He is actively involved in our lives. And often, it is He who opens the door to hard times and suffering, for challenges and trials."***

### **He Allows Suffering (vv. 19-22)**

***[33:19] "A person is also rebuked by pain on his bed,  
And with constant complaint in his bones;  
[20] So that his life loathes bread,  
And his soul, food that he should crave.  
[21] "His flesh wastes away from sight,  
And his bones, which were not seen, stick out.  
[22] "Then his soul comes near to the pit,  
And his life to those who bring death.***

Job's "friends" always tied Job's suffering and pain to his sin. Elihu didn't do that.

But he did affirm the reality of suffering AND he affirmed that God has a hand in it. Sometimes an active hand; sometimes passively and permissively.

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<sup>12</sup> Elihu speaks of this in Job 36 and 37, foreshadowing what God will also say in His speeches. (Job 38-41)

<sup>13</sup> Your Bible tells you about God's mercy, grace, love, holiness, and justice. God gave us the collected writings that make up our Bibles because He wants us to know Him. It is in the Gospels and the writings of the apostles that we learn about Jesus. His teachings and miracles and love tell us all we need to know about God and His ways.

In just a moment we'll hear Elihu speak to the purpose behind God's policy of allowing suffering.

But before we get there, we hear of one more way in which God pursues people. He sends someone to serve as a mediator, an advocate.

### **He Sends Mediators / Advocates (vv. 23-28)**

*Sometimes, God will send a mediator...*

This mediator will guide the sufferer into truth. In Job's case, it was Elihu. In other cases, it will be another man or a woman or even an angel.

***[33:23] "If there is an interceding angel for him,  
One out of a thousand,***

***To remind a person of what is right for him,***

***[24] And he is gracious to him, and says,***

***'Free him from going down to the pit,  
I have found a ransom;'***

***[25] Let his flesh become fresher than in youth,***

***Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor;***

***[26] Then he will pray to God, and He will accept him,***

***So that he may see His face with joy,***

***and He will restore His righteousness to that person.***

***[27] "He will sing to people and say, 'I have sinned and perverted  
what is right,***

***And it is not proper for me.***

***[28] 'He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit,***

***And my life shall see the light.'"***

This mediator / advocate will:  
*graciously remind* the needy person of what is right. (v. 23b)  
*deliver* the one who is Hell-bent for destruction. (v. 24)  
*intercede* (pray to God) for the person in need. (v. 26a)  
*restore* the person to a right standing before God. (v. 26b)  
*lead* the person to praise God for His salvation. (vv. 27-28)

It is a tremendous gift when God sends a mediator. That is exactly the role that Elihu had been sent to play for Job. And that is also the role that God send another Mediator to play for you and me.

*One time, God sent a **MEDIATOR***

Everything that Elihu did for Job, Jesus did for all of us to the N<sup>th</sup> degree two thousand years ago. That's what we call GOSPEL!

He brought us grace, delivered us from death, interceded for us, restored us to life through His death, brought us salvation, and put a song of praise to God in our hearts!

He is our Mediator and Advocate and Savior. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, who proves once and for all that God cares, God is involved, God pursues.

That is Gospel, and this caring, involved, pursuing God invites you, today, to believe in Jesus, receive the free gift of eternal life, and begin the adventure of life with Him.

So, God has pursued people in all kinds of ways. He has communicated, protected, allowed suffering, and sent mediators. Why?

All that God does, He does with a redemptive purpose in mind.

### **God Redemptive Purpose (33:29-33)**

#### **The Purpose of Communication, Protection, Mediation**

***[33:29] "Behold, God does all these things for a man, two or three times,***

***[30] To bring back his soul from the pit,***

***So that he may be enlightened with the light of life.***

God gets involved in the details of our lives to bring us back from a destructive "**pit.**" He is out to do us good.

It is easy to see how God's work in communicating His ways, and His work of protecting us from self-destruction, and His work of providing mediators to direct us in the way of life are all redemptive.

These all show God's love and goodness.

It's harder to see the redemptive purpose of suffering. But Elihu wants Job and us to know that God allows suffering into our lives for redemptive purposes, too.

### **The Purpose of Suffering**

*Suffering is, sometimes, the consequence of bad behavior*

Of course, sometimes we suffer as a direct result of our behavior. Our bad choices may lead to a harvest of terrible consequences.

But Job wants to know about his suffering, the kind where there is no clear cause-effect relationship between sin and suffering.

Frankly, we wonder about that, too. How is it good that God allows that? Again, let's listen to Elihu.

*Suffering is, often, God's wake-up call*

**[33:29] "Behold, God does all these things for a man, two or three times,**

**[30] To bring back his soul from the pit, So that he may be enlightened with the light of life.**

So, what is the "**pit**" from which God seeks to deliver us?<sup>14</sup>

Based on what was the main thrust of Elihu's speech here in Job 33, I think that the "**pit**" from which God wants to deliver us is the pit of thinking that we can live independent of God. He wants to deliver us from the pit of "**pride**" (33:17).

<sup>14</sup> I suppose the "**pit**" could be a figure of speech for lots of things. It could be that Elihu has in mind eternal separation from God in Hell, but his primary reference has to do with life on earth.

The most dangerous, soul-killing, God-estranging sin around is not addiction to alcohol or drugs. It's not sexual sin. It's not anger or greed or hatred.

It is the notion that God is not or that if He is, He is irrelevant.

As God sees it (and it is very important to see things as God sees them), the worst predicament anyone can ever be in is to believe, "*I've got this*" about life. That is life in the "**pit**." There is no good end to that way of thinking, so God works to deliver us from that pit.

Yes, there are certainly things besides suffering that can deliver us from pride.

Sometimes, instruction from Scripture will heighten our awareness of God and will bring us out of the pit. Sometimes a wise counselor or a good friend will open our eyes to our need for Him.

But, often, more effective than anything else, suffering forces us to realize that we are least in control of what matters to us most.

Suffering gets our attention in a way that prosperity and rich blessing and comfort and ease and counsel and advocacy don't.<sup>15</sup>

God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, knows that we have problems. Big problems.

We mistakenly think that our problems - how to pay the mortgage, a troubling health issue, the state of our marriage, the welfare of our daughter, national turmoil - are our biggest problems.<sup>16</sup>

God knows that what we call our "problems" are not our biggest problems.

<sup>15</sup> Note as well 2 Peter 3:8-9, Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 15 for God's willingness to use suffering redemptively.

<sup>16</sup> Yes, God sees the affliction of the oppressed - and He is moved by it. But He also sees their sin - and He views sin as a greater problem than affliction.

He knows that our biggest problem is that we don't live like the dependent people He created us to be.

Wise, young Elihu understood that *"self-determination"* and *"independence from God"* is code for *"self-destruction."*

So, He graciously allows suffering to come our way to wake us up to the futility of self-sufficiency. He breaks us of the illusion that we are in control.

Suffering is extremely effective in opening our eyes to God. Suffering prompts us to look up.

When Jerry Sittser, who was and is a professor at a Christian college,<sup>17</sup> wrote a book about a car wreck that killed his mother, wife, and daughter, he didn't title the book, The Wreck that Wrecked My Life.

Writing several years after the wreck, he titled his book A Grace Disguised (a wonderful book), because over time, Sittser found grace and strength and a deeper walk with God than he had ever known, through his tragedy and loss.<sup>18</sup>

When C. S. Lewis wrote a book about the loss of the love of his life - his wife - cancer, he didn't title it, My Great Loss.

He gave it the title, A Severe Mercy. Lewis wrote that he learned more about life and God through his suffering than he did through his brilliant intellect.

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<sup>17</sup> A professor emeritus at Whitworth University, Sittser specializes in the History of Christianity, Christian Spirituality, and Religion in American Public Life.

<sup>18</sup> Early in the book, Sittser describes the night in 1991 when he suffered his lifetime loss. *"...it was dark. Ten minutes into our trip home I noticed an oncoming car on a lonely stretch of highway driving extremely fast. I slowed down at a curve, but the other car did not. It jumped its lane and smashed head-on into our minivan. I learned later that the other driver was drunk, driving eighty five miles per hour. His pregnant wife, who was with him, was killed in the crash."* Sittser goes on to describe watching, helpless, as his mother, his wife, and his youngest daughter all also died. In the chaos that followed at the site of the collision, *"the realization sweeping over me that I would soon plunge into a darkness from which I might never again emerge as a sane, normal, believing man."*

Lewis would go on to write elsewhere, *"God whispers in all our pleasure, but He shouts in our pains. Pain is His megaphone to rouse a dulled world."* (from The Problem of Pain)<sup>19</sup>

In the absence of suffering, I can be lulled into the false belief that I am the captain of my own ship, that I've got the whole world in my hands.<sup>20</sup> Same for you.

This - the independent streak - is the *"pit"* from which Elihu says God will graciously deliver us - and that God will often do so by way of suffering.

I can personally testify that the seasons of greatest disruption in my life have been for me the seasons of my greatest intimacy with God.

Sure, those times when life is smooth, and everything is copacetic are nice.

But spiritual breakthroughs have happened most frequently when life in the church is in turmoil, when there are challenges at home, when there has been disappointment and loss.

Many of you who have suffered far more than I have will testify to the same thing.

So, when your friend is reeling from some devastating blow, let him know that you are for him. Make sure that he knows that you're not out to get him.

And when your friend's reeling turns to railing against God, lovingly and gently remind him of God's goodness.

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<sup>19</sup> God is willing to allow SEVERE suffering to come our way to shake us from our complacent independence and self-sufficiency. This pain may be severe, even coming close to bringing death (33:19-22 - or see Job). But, if God can thereby gain our attention, He can finally redeem us from the pit of destruction.

<sup>20</sup> Without such opposition, chastening, trials, challenges, and personal earthquakes, we typically fail to seek God (Crabb, Finding God, chapter 15).

Remind him that God has proved Himself to be a good and gracious Savior. Remind him of Jesus. Remind him of God's protections.

Reflect with him about what his suffering tells him about how little control he actually has in life, and then direct him to put his trust in God, the Rock.

### **Conclusion:**

Right now, my friend, the one I mentioned at the beginning for whom I wanted to be Elihu and was struggling to find words, is serving Jesus.

That's important. Remember. The whole reason for Job's suffering was because Satan wagered that Job would fold if hardship hit. He would cease to trust and obey God if trials came. God said that Job would stand firm.

Today, God, Satan, the angels, friends, and enemies are all watching to see what we will do when the chips are down.

We can learn from Elihu's words and let suffering prompt us to look up.

And we can play the part of Elihu with our suffering friend and point them to faithfulness, even in their pain. Your loving assist will mean a win, both for God's Kingdom AND for your friend.