

Keynotes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on 16/5/2022

Series: "Seeing God through Suffering" Pt 8

"Prepared to hear God's voice"

Text: Job 32 verses 1-12

Scripture references from the ESV

Job 32:1-12 So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. ² Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. ³ He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. ⁴ Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he. ⁵ And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger. ⁶ And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said: "I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you. ⁷ I said, 'Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.' ⁸ But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. ⁹ It is not the old^[a] who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right. ¹⁰ Therefore I say, 'Listen to me; let me also declare my opinion. ¹¹ "Behold, I waited for your words, I listened for your wise sayings, while you searched out what to say. ¹² I gave you my attention, and, behold, there was none among you who refuted Job or who answered his words.

Please read the whole of chapters 32-37 in your Bible

How have you responded recently when suffering has hit you? It is a question we need to ask ourselves.

The Bible speaks in terms of two kinds of evil. One comes because we live in a world that is under a curse because of sin. It is a world filled with sinful human beings so wrong things happen to us such as a thief breaking into our home, illness, or a friend turning against us for no reason. The other evil comes from within us because we are part of the problem of evil in the world. Humanity is sinful and we share in that sin, simply by being human. We may only become aware of our sinfulness when suffering comes.

- A thief breaks into our home and we find anger rises in us.
- Illness hits us and we begin to despair and to blame God.

- A friend turns against us and we cut them off and gossip about them in order to destroy their character

Do you respond to suffering with sinful thoughts, actions and speech?

Job has reached this point. He was a blameless man who was suffering more than any of us have ever suffered, though not because of any hidden sin in his life (2:3 see p4). He knows that:

- God sovereignly governs the world so concludes that God is afflicting him
- He hasn't committed the kind of sins that deserve the suffering he is experiencing so concludes that God is unjust and doesn't care (9:32-34 see p4)

This is a terrible indictment against God, born out of Job's great suffering, and he will have to confess and repent of it.

Job's suffering is leading him to respond sinfully

However, God won't allow his servant to stay in this place. We now begin to see God restoring Job (Ch32ff). He does this by means of his word, initially through the mouth of Elihu. Elihu has been with Job and his friends from the start, but out of respect for their seniority, he has kept silent.

- He has listened to Job protesting his blamelessness, and charging God with injustice
- He has listened to Job's friends charging Job with sin but not able to make their case stick

Now he is unable to keep quiet any longer (32:19-20 see p4) but there is a big difference between Elihu and Job's three friends.

The friends' wisdom is human wisdom, based on human reason.

The wisdom Job needs is the wisdom of God.

God's wisdom is breathed out by God's Spirit into the spirit of a person, so that what they hear is God's words. This is the wisdom that Elihu claims to have. (vv8-9 above). Elihu has opened himself up to hear God's voice and declares:

The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (33:4).

It is a reasonable conclusion to draw that Elihu has the word of God breathed out to him so that he functions as a prophet of God to prepare Job for when God will speak to him. (36:2 see p4 also for further comment on this).

Unlike Job's friends, he is not out to crush Job (33:7 see p4). Instead, he genuinely wants to help him come to a place where he sees God afresh. Job has lost sight of God and as a result:

- Job is charging God wrongly, and his suffering is leading him to sin

Without a clear vision of God, we are at risk that our suffering will lead us to sin against God

To save us from that, we need to grasp three truths about God that Elihu helps us understand.

1. **God is caring.** When someone really listens to us, and speaks into our problems, we know they care.

Job has complained that God won't listen or speak to him, and concluded that therefore God doesn't care. Out of concern both for God's honour and Job's good, Elihu sets out to show Job that

God is a God who speaks

- God speaks through his word (36:2 see p4)
- God speaks into our conscience. (33:14-16 see p4).
- God speaks through our suffering (33:19-20 see p4)

Elihu gives us the reason why. God's purpose in speaking his word to our conscience and in our suffering is to restore us to himself. (33:29-30 see p4). He cares so deeply about us that he is willing to bring suffering into our lives so that we will walk with humility before him and live in obedience to him.

God does not want to leave you in a place where you cannot enjoy God.

2. **God is just.** When we suffer, we often feel that it isn't fair. Job's complaint is that God is being unfair to him.

If we believe that God is sovereign, we can easily get to a place where we think that therefore God is not fair, and that we deserve better from him. We may not actually voice that but it can show up in subtle ways when we think:

- I must pray today because I want God to bless me and make my day go well
or
- What's the point of praying because God doesn't hear me or do anything about it?

Elihu is angered by Job's complaint (which he summarises in **33:9-11, 34:5-6** see p4), because Job is dishonouring God. He rebukes Job and then

- Declares God's justice (**34:10-12** see p4)
- Proves God's justice by highlighting the way he works in the world (through **ch 34** -read in your Bible)
- Applies what he has said to Job, showing him to be acting sinfully in his suffering (**34:36-37** see p4)

Elihu is not saying that Job's suffering is because of sin, unlike Job's friends. Instead he is confronting Job with responding sinfully to his suffering. He is seeking to restore Job to God, not to crush him.

Job's suffering is not a punishment from God for sin, but it has exposed a functional god (an idol) in his heart that is controlling him and causing him to sin. Suffering exposes our hearts and shows what it is that we love more than we love Jesus.

Job, though blameless, is a sinner like all of us.

We all deserve to be cut off from God's grace and presence for all eternity

Yet instead Job is receiving God's grace in the form of God's word. That word is being spoken to him by Elihu. It is being spoken into Job's conscience and it is being spoken through his suffering.

It is grace because God means to bring Job to see him in a new way, a way leading to eternal joy for Job.

3. God is able. Elihu extols God's greatness and majesty (**chs 36 and 37** – please read in your Bible).

One specific example is God's hand at work in the clouds, causing rain to fall where he chooses (**36:27-29** see p4). Scientists are unable to understand how the clouds defy gravity to contain the great weight of water until a particular moment arrives when the rain starts to fall.

Ask yourself, then, if you truly believe that this God, who holds up the clouds and sends them

where he chooses, is able to direct your life for good?

We need to apply these truths in a way that will encourage us to trust God in our suffering.

- a) God cares for us through his word.** When we suffer, we need to hear the voice of God through his word breathed out, spoken into our conscience and through our suffering so that we see his care, justice, wisdom and might. We have his word in the Bible. (**2 Tim 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21** see p4). We need to hear God speak, and the Bible is the place to come to for this.
- Sometimes he will give us a promise that he is going to work things out for us
 - Sometimes he will give us a rebuke to our conscience because we are responding sinfully to his providence

Always it is an act of his loving care for us

God cares enough for us to speak to us from his word

- b) God restores us in Christ.** Elihu shows that God rebukes us in our suffering (**33:19** see p4). Then he tells us:
- God provides a mediator to speak up for us (**33:23-25** see p4)
 - The correct response from us to that mediator is repentance and God's response is mercy (**33:26** see p4)

Who is the mediator who speaks up for us and makes our prayers acceptable so that God accepts us?

It is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not get the punishment we deserve, because Christ has died not just to forgive us from sin but to make us holy so that we can be accepted by God and come into his holy presence. Elihu teaches us this truth (**33:27-28**):

'I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me.

²⁸ He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light.'

Our suffering has not necessarily come from anything we have done wrong, but we may have responded wrongly to it. Though we have spoken wrongly about God or acted ungraciously toward someone else, God has not repaid us for our sin because Jesus has redeemed us.

We meet our Saviour in his word, and when we respond to him with faith, he changes us and we begin to respond to our suffering in the same way that Jesus responded to his own suffering. He responded, as we can begin to:

- With love for God and love for others
- With joy in future glory
- With peace in his heart, knowing that he was right with his Father
- With patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness towards others and in suffering
- With self control so that we too live godly lives

As we meet Christ in his word, we respond with faith to suffering in a way that exalts God.

Job 2:3 And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason."

Job 9:32-34 For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together.³³ There is no [\[d\]](#) arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.³⁴ Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me.

Job 32:19-20 Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst.²⁰ I must speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer.

Job 36:2 Bear with me a little, and I will show you, for I have yet something to say on God's behalf.

Christopher Ash comments on Elihu's words: along with physical breath, the Almighty can for some people at some times, also breath into them his own 'breath', his spirit who will give them understanding and enable them to speak words of truth.

Job 33:7 Behold, no fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you.

Job 33:14-16 For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. ¹⁵ In a dream, in a vision of the night, deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds ¹⁶ then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings,

Job 33:19-20 Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones²⁰ so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food.

Job 33:29-30 Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man,³⁰ to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life.

Job 33:9-11 You say, 'I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me.'¹⁰ Behold, 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 34:5-6 For Job has said, 'I am in the right, and God has taken away my right; ⁶ in spite of my right I am counted a liar; my wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.'

Job 34:10-12 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.

Job 34:36-37 Would that Job were tried to the end, because he answers like wicked men ³⁷ For he adds rebellion to his sin; he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God."

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

2 Peter 1:19-21 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Job 33:19 Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones

Job 33:23-25 If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, ²⁴ and he is merciful to him, 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';

Job 33:26a then man^[a] prays to God, and he accepts him