Elihu's first speech to Job

Job 33

Job 33:1-7 - *"But please, Job, hear my speech, and listen to all my words. 2 Now, I open my mouth; my tongue speaks in my mouth. 3 My words come from my upright heart; my lips utter pure knowledge. 4 The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. 5 If you can answer me, set your words in order before me; take your stand. 6 Truly I am as your spokesman before God; I also have been formed out of clay. 7 Surely no fear of me will terrify you, nor will my hand be heavy on you."*

Background Notes

In Job 3-31, we've discussed the dialog between Job and his three counselor friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. In chapter 32 a fourth counselor named Elihu comes on the scene, and he begins to give his opinion - not only to Job, but to the other three counselors as well.

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar all maintained that Job was suffering because he had sinned, and they accused him of hiding that fact. Elihu doesn't directly accuse Job of a personal or secret sin, and he doesn't say that Job is suffering as punishment for sin. Rather, he says that Job is suffering because God wants to teach Job something. In other words, Job's suffering is not punitive – it's educational.

Elihu, of course, comes closer to the truth, because Job is certainly learning more of the ways of God through his suffering. But even Elihu doesn't have the complete picture. However, Elihu does prepare the ground and pave the way for God to speak directly to Job. After Elihu's four speeches (chapters 32-37), God will speak (chapters 38-41).

Doctrinal Points

1. In his first speech, Elihu requests Job's case.

Do you remember in chapter 32 that Elihu said he was bursting at the seams with words to share with Job? *"For I am full of words; The spirit within me compels me. 19 Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins" (32:18-19).*

So Elihu wants to take on Job's case and help him understand what's going on (v1-7). *…please, Job, hear my speech, and listen to all my words.* "Please listen to me, Job," says Elihu. "I have a lot to share with you!"

Elihu guarantees Job that his words will be true and sincere, and that he won't "lord it over" Job with his arguments, as the other three counselors had done (v3). *"Surely no fear of me will terrify you, nor will my hand be heavy on you" (v7).*

After all, Elihu was just like Job - a mere man of clay. They were both given life by the spirt of God. *"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (v4).* And, *"Truly I am as your spokesman before God; I also have been formed out of clay" (v6).*

But Elihu ***did*** want Job to marshal his words, and present his case before Elihu as best he could, so his case could be examined and analyzed. *"If you can answer me, set your words in order before me; take your stand" (v5).*

In his first speech, Elihu requests Job's case.

2. In his first speech, Elihu reviews Job's charge.

Job 33:8-11 - *"Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying, [9] 'I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me. [10] Yet He finds occasions against me, He counts me as His enemy; [11] He puts my feet in the stocks, He watches all my paths."*

In these verses we see that Elihu has heard everything that Job has said (v 8). Now he summarizes all of Job's claims:
- you claim that you are pure and innocent and without guilt (v9)
- you say that God counts you as an enemy without cause (v10)
- you say that God watches every step that you take and has unfairly put your feet in stocks." (v11).

In these verses in his first speech, Elihu reviews Job's charge.

3. In his first speech, Elihu refutes Job's claim.

Job 33:12-18 - *"Look, in this you are not righteous. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. [13] Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words. [14] For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it. [15] In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds,[16] then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction. [17] In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, [18] he keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword."*

Elihu tells Job that his position is not right (v12). He doesn't accuse Job of a hidden personal sin as the other three counselors did, but he says that Job is wrong to dare to question God's ways. After all, God is greater than man, and He

doesn't have to give an accounting of His words and ways to anyone. *"Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words" (v13).*

However, says Elihu to Job, God does speak to man, buy man doesn't always realize that God is communicating. *"For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it" (V14).*

God can speak to people in dreams in dreams, or in visions at night. *"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds."* Through this means God can guide and warn men. He can keep him from pride on the one hand, and preserve their lives from danger on the other. *"Then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction. In order to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man, He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword" (v16-18)." (v15).*

Job 33:19-22 - *"Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, and with strong pain in many of his bones, [20] So that his life abhors bread, and his soul succulent food. His flesh wastes away from sight, and his bones stick out which once were not seen. Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, and his life to the executioners" (v19-22).*

In addition, God can speak to people through pain. It doesn't take much insight to realize that Elihu has Job in mind here, right? So Elihu's overall point is that God is **not** using Job's suffering to punish Job for sin that he has committed. Rather, God is using pain in a pedagogical way, or an educational way - to get Job's attention, to speak to him, and to teach him.

This is certainly a biblical truth. God can speak to us and teach us through suffering. As C.S. Lewis wrote in his book, **The Problem of Pain,** "God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our conscience, but He shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

God can also speak to men through angels. *"If there is a messenger for him, a mediator, one among a thousand, to show man His uprightness" (v23).* If God does use an angel to communicate to a person, it's a rare event. *"One among a thousand"* should be a valuable guideline and caution for believers who think God's angels speak to them all the time.

Job 33:24-30 - *"Then He is gracious to him, and says, 'deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom.' His flesh shall be young like a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth. He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him; he shall see His face with joy, for He restores to man His righteousness. Then he looks at men and says, 'I have sinned, and perverted what was right, and it did not profit me.' He will redeem his soul from going down to the Pit, and his life shall see the light. Behold, God works all these things, twice, in fact, three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the Pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of life."*

Here Elihu tells Job what will take place if a person will just listen to what God is saying through these various means! Clearly Elihu has Job and his suffering in view here. And notice that Elihu ***does*** believe that Job has sinned. For Elihu, however, Job's suffering is not punishment for that sin, but rather God is using Job's suffering to speak to Job and to teach him. And if Job will listen, he will be restored to health, and his joy in the Lord will return. Elihu believes that God often uses these means to speak to man and to prolong his life (v29-30).

Job 33:31-33 - *"Give ear, Job, listen to me; hold your peace, and I will speak. 32 If you have anything to say, answer me; speak, for I desire to justify you."*

Elihu says, listen up, Job, because I have much more to say (vv1-33)! He challenges Job to speak up if he has any questions about his analysis of Job's case. If not - keep quiet and listen!

In his first speech, Elihu refutes Job's claim.

Practical Application

Use a person's name when counseling them.

We've seen that Elihu is a better counselor for Job than Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar because Elihu comes closer to the truth about Job's suffering. In addition, Elihu is a better counselor because he relates to Job on a personal level - by using Job's name when he addresses him. The other three counselors didn't use Job's name. Three times in his dialogs with Job, Elihu addresses Job directly by name:

Job 33:1 - *"But please, Job, hear my speech, and listen to all my words."*

Job 33:31 – *"Give ear, Job, listen to me; hold your peace, and I will speak."*

Job 37:14 - *"Listen to this, O Job; stand still and consider the wondrous works of God."*

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar never mentioned Job's name, either directly or indirectly in their dialogs with their friend Job. How impersonal! Maybe they wanted to keep their distance from him?

When counseling, speak the person's name. This is a much better way for building relationships and breaking down barriers. Notice how often our Lord used a person's name when counseling them and teaching them!

Use a person's name when counseling them.