

Elihu's Speech – Part 3

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Elihu contends against the speeches of Job's friends, and rebukes Job for his assertions
2. aim – To cause us to return to the sovereignty of God in the midst of every situation, good or bad
3. passage – Job 32:1-37:24

b. outline

1. Elihu Asserts His Right to Speak (32:1-22)
2. Elihu Rebukes Job's Conclusions (33:1-35:16)
3. Elihu Defends the Majesty of God (36:1-37:24)

c. opening

1. the **entry of Elihu** into the discussion
 - a. Elihu has *obviously* been sitting and listening to Job and his friends
 1. he addresses *primarily* Job for his assertion of “innocence” – he argues that Job has “missed the point” about the justice of God over him – **i.e.** that he's not as righteous as he *thinks* he is
 - b. Elihu serves a number of *possible purposes* in being included here (**e.g.**):
 1. he *reorients* the entire debate – he turns the focus *away from Job to God*
 2. **now (chaps. 36-37)**: he makes that turn complete, and “opens the door” for God to speak
 - a. not that the Almighty God *needs* an introduction ...
 - c. **IOW (the best we can say)**: Elihu is the “curtain” that rises before the main character ... and now, the curtain begins to rise ...
2. **Calvin (again)** notes the following that we must consider (from **Sermon 146** on **37:14-24**):
 - a. Elihu instructs us, through Job, to learn (in our ignorance) not to challenge God's wise judgment and deeds, for his judgments (decrees) and deeds *are far greater than we can grasp*
 1. Calvin suggests three (3) things to consider from Elihu's speech:
 - a. we **must** ponder the excellence and majesty of God which can be seen in all of his works
 - b. but, inasmuch as we are ignorant and slow-witted, we must not give *only* a “passing glance” at what God sets before us – we must be *diligent* to pursue what he *has* made known
 - c. and, we must *not* trust our own intellect and think we have the ability to make good judgments – we must know it is *his Word* that reveals what we are to understand
 1. **IOW**: this is *not* a journey of “self-exploration,” but a journey of *revelation*
 - d. thus, the Christian life is **a journey to grasp the majesty of God**

“So, let us be content to consider [pursue] what we do not understand *at the outset* [of our Christian faith], and let us not be weary in that endeavor. If we have lived for a while in the world and are *still learning* and have not achieved that perfect, much-coveted understanding [i.e., of all God has revealed], let us not lose courage, but let us *pursue* that endeavor, for we will make great progress if we learn in our lifetimes to sense the *marvels* contained in God's works.”(Calvin, brackets & emphasis mine)
 - b. so ... Elihu will turn the attention of the men *to God and his ways*, particularly the justice, greatness, and majesty of God – away from the “puny” desire of Job, et. al. to just find an “answer”
 1. a turning to the **nature** of God as **the thing to be sought out**, especially in suffering
3. **so far**: in **chaps. 33-35**, Elihu has extolled the *justice* of God
 - a. God's justice is *perfect* – God will judge all men for their deeds; no one (including Job!) is “exempt” from examination, *for every violation of God's law is a personal affront to his holiness*
 - b. **i.e.** Job's protestations of innocence go too far – God is holy, and Job *will* be judged
 - c. **we know**: Job is righteous *by the decree of God* – it is *God himself* who has put Job forward as just, and that it is *God himself* who “vindicates” Job through this entire event
 1. **IOW**: the story of Job is a picture of men attempting to grasp *God* – Elihu elevates God's justice (and rightly so!), but *misses* that it is *God himself* who justifies sinners *before* that justice (and, specifically, *in the work of Christ Jesus*)
 2. **IOW**: as we approach Elihu's final words, we must remember to do so *through* the lens of what **we** know about God's greatness and majesty ... before God himself speaks ...

III. Elihu Defends the Majesty of God (36:1-37:24)

Content

a. Elihu claims his authority to speak for God (36:1-4)

1. **read 36:2-4:** Elihu claims to be speaking to Job on behalf of God himself
 - a. *"I have yet something to say on God's behalf"* (v. 2) = Elihu believes that his words are *from the very mind of God himself*; that he can speak *for God*, even as a man
 1. an *extraordinary assertion*, given the "availability" of inspired material in his day (**i.e.** zero!)
 2. **assumption:** Elihu is being rather *braggadocios*, elevating himself as (nearly!) God-like
 - a. **e.g.** *"I will get my knowledge from afar"* (v. 3), *"for truly my words are not false"* (v. 4a), *"one who is perfect in knowledge is with you"* (v. 4b)
 3. **however:** Elihu is young (with all the "immaturities" of youth), and he "overstates" his position in order to make a point = **the knowledge of who God is can only come from God himself**
 - a. **as above:** Elihu is wanting Job (and his friends!) to think about all of this *from God's point of view* = turning the conversation away from Job to the greatness and majesty of God
 - b. **i.e.** which is *precisely* the argument of **the entire book** = neither Job, Satan, Job's friends, or (even!) Elihu is the *main character* of this book – it is about **the nature and glory of God as he reveals himself through persons and circumstances in time and space**
 - b. so ... Elihu is "correct" (in essence!) to speak for God – to point men away *from themselves* to the infinite greatness and majesty of God (and the rest of Elihu's speech makes this point ...)
 1. **e.g.** this is the essence of **expository preaching**: to bring a word *from the lips of God himself* to those listening, that they might extol *his* greatness (**i.e.** is it "arrogant" to preach?)

b. Elihu extols the greatness of God (36:5-33)

1. **read 36:5-7, 13-15, 19-21:** Elihu infers (**again!**) that Job's circumstances are an example of God using suffering to deliver the righteous from their sin, *if* they are willing to accept his correction
 - a. *"God is mighty, and does not despise any; he is mighty in strength of understanding"* (v. 5) = God is great (mighty) and his character is such that he acts justly *all the time*
 - b. *"he does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their right"* (v. 6), *"he does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous"* (v. 7a) = God's justice works perfectly, especially for the righteous
 1. in **vv. 7b-12**, Elihu uses the *imagery* of God placing/deposing kings upon/from their thrones
 - a. **e.g.** similar understanding to Nebuchadnezzar's **realization** in **Daniel 4** – that it is *God* who sets kings to rule over nations, and he can do with them as he pleases (**Proverbs 21:1**)
 - b. they can either *"listen and serve him"* and prosper (v. 11), or they can *not* listen and *"perish by the sword"* (v. 12) – God grants to kings *what their behavior towards him deserves*
 2. **note:** very similar to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar's assertion that men get (in this life!) what they "deserve" – that the wicked perish, while the righteous are judged and destroyed
 - a. **e.g.** *"the godless in heart cherish anger ... they die in youth"* (v. 14) **vs.** *"he delivers the afflicted by their afflictions"* (v. 15)
 3. **however:** Elihu is suggesting to Job that God is (in this situation!) using suffering to *prevent* Job from falling into judgment *in the future* (as **asserted** in **chap. 33**)
 - a. **e.g.** *"take care; do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction"* (v. 21)
 - b. **i.e.** that Job is not being punished for his *past* sins, but as a "corrective" for the future
 - c. **IOW:** God's actions *here* (**i.e.** to prevent Job from falling *into* sin) are a reflection of his greatness
2. **read 36:24-33:** Elihu speaks *directly* of the greatness of God
 - a. *"behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable"* (v. 26)
 1. an assertion of the **infinity** of Yahweh: that his nature is *so great* (as infinite) that we (as finite) cannot grasp his nature – because there is no "end" to God (**i.e.** in his magnitude, knowledge, power, wisdom, etc.) we (who are **utterly bounded**) cannot grasp him
 - a. **i.e.** our *limited* nature means we simply cannot *fully fathom* him (and never will!)
 2. an assertion of the **eternality** of Yahweh: that his nature is *beyond* the bounds of time, such that we (as limited in time) cannot grasp his nature – because God "always is" (as the "I AM"), we (who are **utterly time-constrained**) cannot grasp him
 - b. in **vv. 27-33**, Elihu uses the *imagery* of a **rain storm** to picture the power and greatness of God
 1. **e.g.** how many drops of rain are in it (**vv. 27f**), how big the storm will be (v. 29), where the lightning comes and goes (**vv. 30, 32, 33a**), even the movement of cattle (**i.e.** away from the storm) signals his power (v. 33b)
 2. *"for by these he judges peoples; he gives food in abundance"* (v. 31) = although rain storms can be deadly, they are *essential* for the growing of crops and the feeding of people

3. **God's greatness (beyond our comprehension) is the source of life (and death), mercy (and justice), salvation (and condemnation) – no one should ever "ignore" the greatness of God**
 - a. **IOW:** Job, God is working *through your circumstances* to accomplish his purposes, to extol his greatness, and to demonstrate his power over all things – "lean" into it ...
 - b. **ironically:** a *perfect truth*, yet *badly misplaced* – God is *not* demonstrating his greatness *through Job's response* – God is demonstrating his greatness *in spite of it ...*
- c. Elihu extols the majesty of God (37:1-24)**
1. **read 37:1-5:** Elihu continues the "storm" imagery (**from 36:27ff**) to the *majesty* of God
 - a. **i.e.** Elihu turns the storm *into God himself*, as though he *is* the storm ...
 1. in **vv. 6-12**, Elihu describes a number of weather-related events that are all determined by the sovereign God: snow, cold, downpours, icy weather, frozen waters, storms, etc.
 - a. **IMO:** the "cold" nature of this imagery is *somewhat contrary* to the natural climate that Job would have experienced in S Canaan – probably to indicate the *power* of God to do so
 2. in **v. 13**, Elihu notes that these things come either for a) correction, b) for his land (**i.e.** what is needed for crops to grow, or c) for love (**i.e.** just because he is bountiful)
 3. and, in **v. 7**, Elihu says that all of this is "*that all men whom he made may know it*" – that the *natural world* clearly identifies the reality of a Creator God
 - b. his "*voice*" (**vv. 2, 4, 5**) is the power of God's majesty – as God speaks, both the *power* of his speech and the *content* of his words demonstrate his *majesty*
 1. **remember:** it is the *words* of God through which his power is displayed (**e.g.** in creation, in the law, in Scripture, in Christ the *logos*, in the preached gospel raising men from the dead, etc.)
 2. and ... God himself *will* speak, and put this entire event to rest ... (with an important caveat to note about natural vs. special revelation; **next week**)
 2. **read 37:14-18:** Elihu turns to Job to ask this *fundamental rhetorical question*: do you really understand the ways of God?
 - a. **i.e.** if God can do all these things, who are *you* to question his ways? – if God is just and mighty, who are *you* to demand answers from God?
 3. **read 37:21-24:** Elihu completes his speech by extolling the majesty of God
 - a. "*the Almighty—we cannot find him*" (**v. 23**), "*therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise*" (**v. 24**) = to claim wisdom *of your own* is to be "ignored" by God
 - b. **i.e.** Job, your *feeble* attempts to get "an answer" from God *pale* beside his awesome majesty
 4. **God's majesty (beyond our comprehension) is the imagery of boundless wisdom, absolute power, and perfect justice over all – no one should ever "presume" upon God's majesty**
- d. Elihu speech considered**
1. **we know:** Elihu's speech *does* turn us towards the nature of God (as we will see next)
 - a. **i.e.** away from *ourselves* and towards *him*, as he extols *his own nature* in the world
 2. **we assert:** the Christian life is *a journey to grasp the majesty of God*
 1. God is so great that we simply cannot fathom his perfection, greatness, majesty, infinity, etc.
 2. yet, God has *condescended* to make himself known to us, first by the Word, but primarily by entering into his own creation to speak to us as *a man* (**i.e.** what Job did not get to see)
 3. thus, to "grasp the wonder of God" = to look fully into the face of Christ, to hear the words of God *himself* from the lips of Jesus, to see the *glory* of God *in him*, and to pursue *the wonder* of the Triune God through *faith* in his promises of righteousness (**John 1:14; 16-18**)

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."