

## Sermon – 16/05/2010 pm

### Elihu – Angry Young Man

Study Text: Job 32

A woman enjoyed Bible study and fellowship with other women in the church. That was until she was diagnosed with cancer. When one of the women in the group heard this news she no longer wanted to associate with such person. Why? Because she believed the woman got cancer because of some sin. She did not want to have fellowship with a sinner. Do you think Job's experience is unique? Do you think his friend's theology no longer exists? Think again!

Job finished his closing brief in which he declared his innocence and called upon God to answer him (31:35). He had been calling for God to hear his complaint from the beginning. Why was God afflicting him when he was innocent? Job knew God was just. He did not give up on God as his wife did. But he could not understand why God was acting unjustly towards him. Under the terms of the covenant God should bless those who are upright and curse only those who are wicked.

God did not respond to Job's self defence. He made Job wait. God heard all that Job said, and all that his friends said, but he chose not to respond immediately. God's timing is perfect. He always speaks and acts at the right time, which is not always the time we would like – or demand. Are you guilty of setting deadlines for God to answer your prayer? Some think Gideon's act of throwing out the fleece means they can set up a test though which God will answer their prayer. But 'God acts in his own time; he is not at human beck and call'.

### Age

In chapter 32 we are introduced to a young man called Elihu. He launches into a speech that occupies the next six chapters. He boldly claims that he is going to enlighten Job and his friends, but for all his big talk Elihu does not say much that is new. For this reason, and because his name is not mentioned outside of these chapters, some critics doubt the authenticity of these chapters.

But Elihu is well aware of what Job and his friends have said. His speech represents yet another human attempt to explain suffering for which there is no earthly explanation. Elihu will claim to speak on God's behalf as one perfect in knowledge (36:2, 4), but he was just as ignorant as the others of the heavenly contest between God and Satan.

The name 'Elihu' means 'Yah is my God' – Yah being short for Yahweh. It is in fact the same name as Elijah. The other three friends were Edomites. He is a Buzite and therefore related to Abraham – Buz was a nephew of Abraham (Gen 22:21). We are not told about his relationship to Job. Presumably he was a friend but not in the party of three that came to comfort Job (2:11). True to his name, Elihu sought to be God's defender.

Elihu overheard the conversation and the arguing between Job and the three friends but out of respect for age he held his tongue. Those who are older should speak first, for wisdom comes with age (32:6). We would agree that his respect for age is a positive feature of Elihu's character. He was also a good listener – at least until his outburst. Among his other good qualities, Thomas notes his concern for the glory of God, and his passion.

Calvin said that 'when God lets a man live a long time in this world he gives him grace to be able to profit those who are younger' It is tragic that in our society respect for age and the wisdom that

comes with age is not valued as it should be. Why is this? It is not only the young that are at fault. When they are not taught to honour their parents, nor taught the wisdom parents have acquired, they will not show proper respect for their elders.

Elihu goes on to qualify what he said. Sometimes the elders are not wise, nor do the aged always understand justice (32:9). Wisdom is from God so it may be given to the young (32:8). It is not uncommon to see a son acting more wisely than his father.

## Anger

Elihu only spoke when silence came over the group. Job's three friends – now simply called 'men' – ceased answering Job *because he was righteous in his own eyes* (32:1). Not since chapter 2 has there been narration like that found here in chapter 32. The narrator makes sure we understand that Elihu is angry – he tells us four times. He is doubly angry at Job for justifying himself rather than God.

Job claimed he was in the right which to Elihu meant he was making God to be in the wrong. It was a serious charge, but did Elihu really understand what Job was saying? Like the others he thought Job is claiming to be without sin (33:9). He was angry with the others for not answering Job effectively. They condemned Job but did not convince him. They told Job to repent but he clung to his integrity – and to his God.

'Counselling from an angry heart can be dangerous'. Passion is one thing. Anger is another. It is not sinful to be angry but the apostle Paul warns – *in your anger do not sin; do not give the devil a foothold* (Eph 4:26, 27). Anger leads to loss of self control. Without self control no one will be helped.

Thomas quotes Martin Lloyd Jones on this subject so we will do the same 'Never open the door to the devil. When you lose your temper you open it wide; it could not be wider. Nothing opens the door more widely than anger, and for this good reason. The moment you are controlled by your temper you are no longer able to reason, you are no longer able to think, you can no longer give a balanced judgment for you are altogether biased on one side and against the other... is there anything that leads to more trouble than anger?'

Elihu said that he was going to be completely impartial and not flatter anyone in his comments (32:21, 22). But it is one thing to say this and another to maintain it. His opening words leave us in no doubt as to his opinion of himself! We might ask how he was going to be impartial and reasoned in his judgment when he was so angry.

## Answer

'Elihu introduces himself in a reluctant manner, saying almost nothing at all and finding it necessary to repeat it several times' writes one commentator. 'For all his big talk, Elihu does not really say much that is new' writes another. He has been called a brilliant young fool. Luther made note of him as 'an empty gas bag'. It is difficult to have a high opinion of a man who says *I am full of words; I am like a new wineskin ready to burst* (32:18, 19). We like to think of a man speaking with care and calculation, not with arrogant outbursts. But God can use all sorts of people to reveal truth so we will look at what this young man has to say.

*I will answer on my part. I too will declare my opinion* (32:17). This is the third time he has said this. He was bursting to speak but had trouble getting to the point. Although he said *I will declare my opinion*, Elihu did acknowledge that it was God who gives wisdom and understanding – to

young as well as to old (32:8). He did express a fear of God (32:22). Elihu was going to be an arbiter between Job and God. He was going to defend God against Job's attack.

Elihu was going to be impartial. The dialogue between Job and his friends became personal and bitter. Elihu was not going to join either side. But what he says about Job is just as harsh as what they said. He accused Job of being wicked and rebelling against God (34:36). Job does not get to reply to Elihu but we can imagine what his response would be.

Elihu was ready to speak on God's behalf (36:2). We are reminded of Zophar who presumed to speak on God's behalf (11:7). God is almighty and we cannot find him said Elihu (37:22, 23). Yet he was going to speak for God anyway. He was going to defend God and silence Job. But God is more than able to defend himself. In the end Job was silenced by God and repented in dust and ashes because of God's awesome majesty. Elihu did close his speech with reference to the wondrous works of God (37:14) and the awesome majesty of God (37:22), but Job had already acknowledged these truths (26, 28:24f).

Job's repenting in dust and ashes at the end (42:6) does not indicate that Job is confessing his sin and believing in God. It cannot be said, as some seek to do, that his suffering brought him to the point of confession and believing in God. From the start he was blameless and upright man, a servant of God. Job was not an 'unregenerate' man, if we want to use that term. Job feared God. He cried out to God day and night.

In his suffering Job did overstep the mark, we might say, in his questioning and demanding an answer from God. His effort to justify himself did lead to some blindness on Job's part. But the accusations of his friends, and now this young man Elihu were not correct. They, like Job, were guilty of darkening the counsel of God (38:2), of speaking without knowledge of matters that belong to corridors of heaven.

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