

Be Incensed

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[0 : 00] Okay, today's going to be a little bit different in terms of the sermon. You can't, we can't, we've said this before, we can't work through Job in the way we would maybe like to or in the time that we would like to.

So what I want to do is I want to do a brief summary. Okay, this is not going to be a lecture, but I'm going to use the screens for a little bit.

Sometimes it helps. Oops. Okay. Right, so we're going to, I'm going to use the screens for a little bit of what we're doing and first, because I'm jumping around with one or two verses as well.

So rather than scabble around and look them all up, I'll just put them on the screen because today we're going to look at Elihu, okay, who is a new character for us in the book of Job.

Okay. So just to remind you of the structure, it's really important that we have a rough idea of the structure of Job so that it makes sense what we're saying today. Okay.

[1 : 06] So we looked at Job 1 and 2 and that was setting the scene. That was the historical story, what was happening to Job, that is riches then, the loss of all that and the behind the scenes dealing between God and Satan about Job's life.

Okay. And then from chapter 2 or chapter 3, that really should be, to 31, we have the dialogue.

Okay. We've been looking at that for a few weeks between Job and Eliphaz, Bildar and so far his three comforters.

Okay. The guys that come along to try and make sense of his suffering and try and bring the God perspective into it without really doing that very well, without really bringing God into it terribly well and we know that God condemns them at the end of the book and we went forward to the end of our book, on to the end of the book to find that out because it makes it easier to understand.

Okay. And so this bit from chapter 32 to 37, Elihu enters the stage. Okay. So we've got five chapters with simply Elihu speaking.

Okay. Come back to that. And then 38 to 41, God speaks. So God responds to all that's been going on and answers Job, possibly in ways we didn't expect.

[2 : 26] So that's the kind of picture of the book ending with a conclusion. So the conclusion might not be the one we're looking for or the one we would like, but the conclusion is God's conclusion that's given to us in Job 42.

So that's the kind of, that's the way the book is structured. And up till now, we've been looking at that, apart from the beginning, we've been looking at that big chunk, the responses to Job from his three friends.

We haven't really looked at Job yet. So what we want to do is to recognise the importance of mining scripture.

There's a verse here in Colossians which says that our hearts we've encouraged being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full of students and understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And that thing includes Job, the words of Christ, the word of Christ, the word incarnate, the word God that we have. The Bible is the word of Christ, the word of God.

[3 : 26] And there is deep mystery in there that we can begin only to unravel through the perspective of faith and with Jesus Christ and his insight and his knowledge.

So there are bits of the Bible which aren't so easy to understand. They're treasures. Now like all treasure you need to mine it, it doesn't just fall into your lap.

So if something's worthwhile, sometimes it takes work to understand it and that is absolutely true of Job. We have to study Job. I'm hoping that you've read Job through at least twice.

I would be delighted if you're wrestling with it in your own time, beyond this very brief summary and oversight of the book, that you're wrestling with what God is saying, that you're working at it, that it's becoming something you're mining.

I've certainly had to mine more than I've ever mined before in terms of preaching. And the other thing we need is the Holy Spirit. Okay, we need God's Holy Spirit.

[4 : 29] We need his wisdom and we need his help to read Scripture, all Scripture, for him to bring light of God to it and to apply it to our hearts.

And that is absolutely true here. No amount of digging will give us God's word to us unless we are dependent on God's Spirit.

I hope you've come praying for God's Spirit to speak through the word, sung the word, read the word, preached, that it will change and transform your life and that we will learn new truth from it, that we will mine together.

I'm going to pray briefly for the Holy Spirit, guidance and insight into our study today. Lord God, we ask and pray that as we study this word of yours, that we would not come to it arrogantly or bored or disinterested or untouched, but they would look for the Spirit of God to help us.

We are in great need of your Holy Spirit to bring light and bring insight and bring help to us as we study this difficult book, but hugely significant and helpful book about the character of God and the nature of faith and the problem of suffering.

[5 : 45] So help us, we pray, Heavenly Father. Amen. Okay, so what I want first to do is look at Elihu within the book of Job.

Okay? Now there are different opinions about Elihu, some people are very against him, some people are a bit more for him, but so what I've tried to do is I've tried to glean hints from the text that would help us to see who Elihu is and why he may be a bit different from the other three, okay? And hopefully that will help us as a foundation for thinking about what he has to say. Okay, so Elihu is a new kid on the block here, okay?

He hasn't been mentioned at any point in the previous 31 chapters. He's new to the whole story, so he kind of comes in from left field, okay?

Comes in from left field, we don't expect him. He's not mentioned before and here he comes into the story. So that in itself might be significant remembering that the Holy Spirit is the overseer and is the ultimate author of scripture.

[7 : 01] He's a young man, he says that himself in the chapter we read, and he's a young man with a lineage. That is, we're told who he is, who his dad is and what his family is and where he comes from.

That doesn't really mean too much to us in Scotland, but it would mean a lot in the culture that this was originally written into.

It gives Elihu a sense of significance, more so than the three comforters. None of them get quite the same genealogy as Elihu gets here. That may be significant.

Certainly, it would be culturally significant in the day. What else do we notice about Elihu in the book of Job? Well he's given four speeches and they're completely uninterrupted.

You see all the other comforters? Job responds to them. Job speaks back to them. Job answers them and their speeches are broken up right through the book.

[8 : 00] So you come back to them again and again. But Elihu is given just car blanche. He's given four clear opportunities for, as it were, four speeches and he's uninterrupted by Job.

No kickback from Job and none from God later on, which may be significant. Job, God speaks against the three comforters, Job's three friends.

He doesn't say anything, at least he's not recorded, about Elihu. Now there may be different reasons for that. But his four speeches that are uninterrupted seem to follow the stalemate that has existed between Job and his comforting friends who aren't very comforting.

And it links straight into God speaking. So you've got Job and his three friends and they're kind of burucking about and fighting away together. And then you've got this four uninterrupted speeches and then you've got God speaking.

So he's almost a link between God and what has been happening. And he also claims prophetic insight, I think, in chapter 32.

[9 : 16] If I am full of words, he says, the spirit within me constrains me. Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent, like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak that I may find relief.

I must open my lips and answer. Now this sounds very like Jeremiah. And the way Jeremiah the prophet said, I can't keep it in. I need to speak what God has given me to say. I have a prophetic responsibility to do so. And he kind of bursts out. He claims prophetic insight. So okay, that's Elihu within the book of Job.

We maybe need to treat him differently because there are hints there that he is not just like the other three. Stick with me, okay? I know it sounds a bit like a lecture at the moment. But stick with me because it's really important that we, I think, begin trying to understand his reasoning. Now there's six chapters here and we're only going to have a very brief overview. But what he does is he responds differently to the others.

[10:18] He responds primarily to Job's words. Job said a lot in the last 30 chapters, okay? And Elihu responds to what Job has said, not so much to what he thinks Job has been doing secretly and needs to confess.

Because remember, that's what the other three comforters, that's their main problem, that's their main failing, isn't it? That they've said all along, Job, you are sinning secretly. Just confess that. Confess that darkness and everything will be right. You'll be blessed in your life. And they presume on something that isn't actually right. Whereas Elihu is responding to Job's words.

You have said in my hearing, I heard the very words. I am pure, I have done no wrong. I am clean and free from sin, yet God has found fault with me. He considers me his enemy.

He fastens my feet and shackles. He keeps close watch on all my paths. So he doesn't accuse Job of secret sin that he needs to confess.

[11:26] He isn't bringing judgment and Job because of something that he doesn't know about. Rather he is unhappy. He is angry with Job's claims of innocence.

With Job's accusation that God is silent and doesn't care that God is unjust. That God is wicked because of what he's doing. That God is allowing the wicked to prosper.

That God isn't listening. Now immediately that begins to resonate with us because that's the kind of complaints we have against God ourselves. These are the complaints that Elihu is speaking into.

That God doesn't care. Maybe particularly relevant today on the week that it's passed. God is letting the wicked prosper. That God isn't. I pray to him but nothing happens.

I read about someone this week who's a Christian who said that a massive turning point in their lives was when they went for three days away to the desert and asked God to speak to them and God said nothing, I guess verbally.

[12:33] And that that has changed their understanding. Now I don't think it should change their understanding if God says nothing when we go to the desert to seek Him.

It doesn't change His character. It doesn't change who He is. But that was the complaint of Job that we have here. And Elihu does seem fiery. He seems harsh.

And I'm sure he still had much to learn himself. But it does seem that he's concerned for God's character, for who God is.

And because he is afraid for Job, if Job goes down this road of accusing God, of blaming God, of being angry with God and for believing, presuming that God hasn't answered.

In fact, Job is doing the same kind of thing as the other three were doing to him. The other three were presuming about Job's secret life.

[13:31] And now Job is presuming about why that God isn't answering. And I think there's a danger, there's a difference between the two responses of Elihu and his three friends.

Can I put it this way? Someone said in a commentary, the friends of Job, the three friends of Job said that he was suffering because he has sinned. That's their basic argument. You are suffering, you're going through difficult times because you're a wretched sinner.

And you're deliberately keeping something from God. You're hiding some secret sin. That's what they were saying. God only blesses those who are blameless. And we've seen that that's exposed and wrong.

But it's as if Elihu is saying that Job, you are sinning as a result of your suffering. In other words, in response to your suffering, you are suffering, you were innocent in that suffering.

But in response to that suffering and your accusations against God, you're beginning to sin. Now, can you see the difference there? They were saying you're suffering because you've been a sinner.

[14:34] He's saying you're sinning as a result of the suffering you're going through. In other words, his response to suffering was on the edge of unbelief.

It was moving towards being unfaithful and not trusting God through it. Now, that's a very fine line, isn't it? And yet that seems to be what we're coming round to.

So that Elihu spends a lot of time in his five chapters defending God's character. Job 33, 14.

He defends that God is not silent. He says, look, God does speak now one way, now another, though no one perceives it in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls in people as they slumber in their beds.

He's saying, God does speak Job. He speaks, he's spoken in prophecy. He may even be hinting that he's speaking through himself at this point. He speaks in conscience. And he goes on to say that he even speaks in suffering.

[15:37] I'll say a little bit more about that at the end because it's quite significant, I think. So he's defending God's character and saying, Job, God is in silent. He is speaking.

He then goes on to say, God must be just. God can be evil. You see, Job was accusing God of being unjust, of being evil. Now that is a very relevant accusation.

And we look at the world in which we live and we think, is God just? Most of the people who don't believe will bring that up as a reason for not believing. They can't believe in the justice of God.

And yet Elihu says, listen to me, men of understanding, far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He goes on to speak at great length about that in that following paragraphs. It's unthinkable, he says. However difficult it is to understand, it's unthinkable. Everything crumbles if the author of justice perverts it himself.

[16:38] You and I have no hope today sitting in the pews if God, who is the author of justice, has shown himself to be unjust. There's nothing left for us. There's nothing but only damnable hell if God, who is just and the author of justice, is actually unjust.

There is no hope for us. If the Almighty can do wrong, then we may as well just pack our bags. We have to work from the truth and the belief that God is right and that one day we will all stand before him who is right and righteous and who will judge our hearts.

Our hearts. Let's forget about the terrorist hearts and the broken hearts and every other heart and think of our own hearts.

And the only safe place for our hearts to be is to have the righteousness of Jesus covering them, because he alone is the righteous one, God himself.

The author of justice is nailed to the cross. Do we minimise and think the gospel and Calvary and what Jesus come to do is insignificant?

[17:57] This is the author of justice is nailed to a cross because he dies in our place. God cannot do evil. And that is in response to Job's accusations and also God is sovereign and powerful.

Oh, sorry, I've gone ahead of myself. I didn't actually put up a verse for that one, but God is sovereign and powerful. He speaks a lot in this chapter as well in chapter 34 about the power and the sovereignty of God.

He says that we are alive. You're alive today. I'm alive today. We are here today. We're breathing today because God has ordained that we can do so. He sustains us today to come to church.

And much of what Elihu seems to be doing, particularly in the last chapter that he has, is pointing towards the power and the sovereignty and the glory and the creative dignity of God.

And it's interesting too that he finishes on that creative theme of who God is and his power. And that's immediately taken up by God. God takes that up in the first time he speaks and goes on to speak about his power and his sovereignty and his glory in creation.

[19:13] So there may be a link there too that makes us think about this character. But he's saying, you know, he's not weak and he's not impotent Job.

He's the designer and the sustainer. Now, as time goes on and as technology goes on, we have the privilege of seeing more and more of that. See nature programs? Do they make you believe less in God?

With the eyes of faith, do they not absolutely cause you to draw breath at the majesty and the glory and the power and the order and the amazing reality of this world in which we live?

God is great. God is powerful and sovereign, not weak and impotent.

People in the West Coast would have understood it this week a bit more with Hurricane Abigail.

Tiny glimpse of the God who has created this world in which we live.

[20:14] And he's wanting Job's perspective to change. Now isn't it interesting that that's the same perspective that God uses that brings Job to his knees in confession and repentance?

And there's more to it, I think, than that. But it's that picture of a sustaining, loving, gracious, intervening God that changes Job finally.

So he defends God's character. I've just skimmed over that. But that seems to be the emphasis of the four speeches of Elihu that he is different from the others. He's wanting to focus attention on God and defend God's character.

He does seem a bit rough around the edges. And if the first time you read it, you think, well, he's just like the others. But I do think there's enough hints in the texts, the text of Scripture there, to treat him differently and to see where he links in with God intervening.

And there's three powerful insights, just very briefly, that we learn in these speeches that he makes that are really beautiful and I think helpful to us, as he also addresses the question of suffering.

[21 : 28] Well, the first is Job 33, where he seems to long for a mediator. He longs for someone to come and help.

If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of a thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, and he is merciful to him and says, deliver him from going into the pit. I have found a ransom. And so he goes on.

And there's a shadowy longing for, as longing is triggered for redemption, for someone to come in and stand on their behalf to redeem them so that they're not alone.

If only there was someone, even someone angelic, someone heavenly. Now that's pointing, obviously an angel is not enough for us, but it points, I hope, for us towards Jesus Christ.

And isn't that our greatest longing today? That today in our ordinary, sometimes very unspiritual lives, we have a mediator.

[22 : 32] We have somebody there that we're not alone. When you wake up in the morning, and the worst thing to feel is absolutely alone. Loneliness is a terrible thing.

And loneliness in the light of the crisis of the world in which we live is also desperate to think that it's only us. What a mess we've made. What a brutal, horrible mess that we can't be rescued from.

We need a mediator. We need a friend. Both, I think, at a macro level, and I'm sure in our own hearts, we need somebody to help us. And that is a longing that is an insight that is pointing here towards the great mediator, Jesus Christ.

But I also say something interesting about suffering, I think, or darkness, which none of the others seem to pick up on or mention. There is a maturity and a softness about the like you as well at some levels.

He says, but none says, and he's speaking of God here, where is God my maker? And this beautiful phrase who gives songs in the night, songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven.

[23 : 47] Is that not a beautiful phrase who gives us songs in the night? And that is a statement that we can only understand when we have sung in the night, in the darkness, and in the suffering.

And it's beyond our human ability to do so. It is a gift of faith, and it's a powerful picture where Elihu here sees that it's possible to praise God in the darkness.

It's not simply about judgment, which the others seem to think. It's not simply about triggering repentance. But there are songs in the night that enable us to sing praise to God all our lives, as we remember from the very beginning of the service.

Whatever our circumstances, the believer can sing songs in the darkness and in the night. Not simply, not trivially, not in a trite way, but because they know and they see and they understand that they are not alone.

And that there is a purpose and there is something happening in their suffering that God intends to use for his glory and for their good.

[25 : 03] That is a beautiful and gentle reality that is different from anything that the others have said and bespoke a character who has a better insight into all that is happening than the others.

And I think the third insight is that he recognises that suffering has the pain, in a sense, he recognises that there can be healing in the pain.

But those who suffer, he delivers in their suffering. He speaks to them in the reflection. So he's not being simplistically saying, you're suffering because you're a sinner, repent of that and you'll be blessed again.

He's saying, look, there's healing in your suffering. Because God has ordained that and it's not to do with your sinfulness. It's to do with his purposes in your life.

And he will speak to us in our affliction, not just from it. Isn't that an amazing insight? He gives prototypical truth that we have here in the middle of the Old Testament, that sometimes the miracle is not in being healed from pain, but it's being healed in pain.

[26 : 25] And it is hearing his voice, not when we're brought out of the suffering, but in the midst of our suffering that he redeems and buys us back and speaks to us and brings hope to us.

Now, that isn't to mean that we look for suffering, nor that we wallow in it, nor that we don't try and come out of it, but we recognise that suffering is not as simplistic as a sin that needs repented of. And the minute that happens, then we'll know blessing again, which seems to be the thinking behind Job's three friends, a very simplistic understanding of our own hearts and our need for God's intervention in work and also of his own purposes in our lives.

So I do believe there's powerful insights here that help us to maybe look at Eli who's slightly differently. Now, next week we're going to look at Job himself.

We haven't, we've looked at a little bit at him through the eyes of the others, but we're going to spend time next week looking at Job because there are also some magnificent treasures in Job's responses.

[27 : 41] There's some magnificent jewels to take and there are also, he stands on dangerous ground, but it's just interesting to work out Job and what he's thinking and also how God responds to him.

But just very briefly as we close, can I just apply this truth to ourselves, applying Job today? When I remind all of us again that we needn't expect all the answers.

Job doesn't give us all the answers, even at the end, we're not giving all the answers. And you might think it's wholly unsatisfactory, the end of Job.

But that's God's answer. And we mustn't think it's wholly unsatisfactory. And we mustn't wag our finger at God and say, why don't you give us something else? Give us something that's clearer and easier and ABC that we can take, because that's God.

And we mustn't expect all the answers. We need to be digging. It's not only that scripture isn't all ABC. There is a recognition that we need to dig for truth to find the treasures of Christ that he promises to give us and we need his Holy Spirit to do that.

[28 : 56] And even in that, he doesn't promise us all the answers because we have to live by faith and not so much by faith when things are going swimmingly, but in the darkness. When you're most tempted, when you're most in pain, when you're most struggling, when you're most lonely, when you're most feeling his absence.

That is when he wants us and seeks us to him. Live by faith. Don't expect all the answers. And also remember that God is God.

I think Job does a lie who appears a little bit angry and unsympathetic to Job. And that may well be a sin on his part, although it's not revealed as such.

But I do think there's a place for righteous indignation, righteous anger. And I do think he is trying to defend God against the accusations of Job because he recognizes Job's character and God is God. So as believers, let's be careful how we speak about God. You know, we live in a society where people say anything about God and they say terrible things about God and God doesn't strike them down.

[30 : 12] It doesn't happen so we think maybe God isn't real there. But let's be very careful that we're not frivolous or trite or shallow in accusing God of things that really we don't know about and quickly dump faith to the side.

See, that doesn't apply here. It's no good, no value. But we can use all our intellect and all our knowledge and all our experience to accuse God for getting that he's the author of our intellect. And he's the sovereign, powerful God of the universe that sustains us and allows us the breath to accuse him. God is God. We need to remember that because he's also the God of the cross. It's just astonishing. Christ is the glorious mediator for us. Remember that, what is spoken of and Job also speaks of it.

Look at that next week of this longing for a mediator, someone to intervene between ourselves and God. We have that in Jesus. Actually, do you have that as he or mediator?

[31 : 25] Are you spiritually alone because you're choosing to be religious or intellectually moral or philosophically upright, but not spiritually childlike in taking Christ to be your mediator?

The one who speaks, the one who acts, the one who redeems and rescues because he's the only one. That's the importance of what we do on a day like this.

That coming to God's house, ah, they'll I use that word because it's not really accurate, isn't God's house. We're God's people. It's just a church. There's no different from anything else in your life. We are all the people of God. We're the Holy, the temple of the Holy Spirit together. God's house is not a building. It's a people.

But when we come together and worship, we come to church to worship, it's significant, it's important. You must, and I must prepare our hearts to come into the presence of God through his word and through worship and through fellowship, preaching who he is.

[32 : 35] And I think we can apply the truth of this passage if my interpretation and that of others is correct regarding Elihu, that sometimes the truth hurts.

Job doesn't respond to what Elihu says. And we don't know why God goes on to speak and he responds to Job in humility and repentance. But maybe it was because he knew that actually Elihu was right and the truth was really sore and painful, but it was ameliorated by the fact that God then went on to speak.

We don't argue against God and that's what he really wanted and what he really needed. And as a community of believers, sometimes the truth's going to hurt, isn't it?

If we're honest with each other in love and in humility as we come together, we're accountable to one another. And if all we're ever doing is just scrabbling around the surface saying we're lovely and things are great and super Christians and we'll love one another's company and we never expose in love and in patience and in gentleness and because we have built relationships that count, expose sometimes truth that hurts our pride and our self-centeredness and our arrogance and our lust, then we're missing out on his healing.

And on brotherhood and sisterhood together. It's easy to take the spirit of the age, isn't it? And just go on to half and move on and not learn from what God will say through his people.

[34 : 16] Now, obviously we need all to be really careful about that and not take that on board. To become crusaders, don't become crusaders. That's just as dangerous.

Just putting everyone else right and that's not what I'm talking about. Not talking about finding everyone else's faults but humbly and gently with a brother and sister seeing and knowing and recognizing where they are heading towards a dangerous place spiritually.

This is not about personalities and it's not about wanting everyone to be like us. But recognizing the spiritual danger some people might be in and you want to keep them from that, I think Elihu wanted to keep job from going down to a dangerous place.

And lastly and very briefly, that suffering and I think we learn that throughout the book obviously suffering is not all darkness. Easy to say but hard to put into practice in our lives.

But we recognize through Christ that he takes what would be without him absolutely random and meaningless and desperate and awful and he brings because of who he is, because he's sovereign and because he's Lord and because he uses even what Satan intends to turn us upside down to curse God and die and he uses that to bring us closer to him.

[35 : 36] Can I finish this with a quote from the voyage of the dawn treader Eustace was trying to get rid of the dragon skin that he had which had been trapped.

He scraped away one set of scales only to find another underneath. Then we have this quote. Then the lion said, but I don't know if it spoke.

You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws. I can tell you but I was pretty near desperate now. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off it hurt worse than anything I'd ever felt. Then he caught hold of me. I didn't like that much.

I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on and he threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment.

[36 : 37] After that it became perfectly delicious. And as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm.

Then I saw why I turned into a boy again. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God we ask and pray that we would remember that you're the God who is sovereign and sometimes that the pain and the suffering we experience is paradoxically healing.

We don't look for that. We don't want that. But give us the patience to let your purposes outwork in our lives. And may we be by faith like children again.

May we be able to understand by digging deep and not having a trite and shallow faith. But by digging deep may we see that you're good and that you're perfect and that you're just and that we can look forward on this resurrection morning to a day when all will be made clear and when you will in your grace and in your fatherly goodness wipe every tear from our eyes.

Enable us to keep that perspective in our lives we ask especially when it's tough. And may we have sympathy and understanding and courage and grace and gentleness to deal with one another especially those who are going through difficulty and pain.

[38 : 28] May we come alongside and may we know when to be quiet and may we know when to speak in respectful and gentle love and may we know what to do.

So help us God in our own ignorance in our own failure and in our own poverty of spiritual life. Help us we repent and we ask that you would accept us in Jesus name because we have no other name by whom we can come.

Amen.