

Elihu Speaks to Job of God's Righteousness

Job Chapter 36:1–22

Job 36:1–3 Elihu also proceeded, and said, ²Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. ³I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

HERE we see the distinct difference between Elihu and Job's other three friends. They had spoken from personal reason, experience, and tradition. Elihu had fetched his *knowledge from afar*. Elihu thus assured Job that the wisdom he was about to bring to him did not originate from himself. It did not originate from man or a group of men but rather from man's Creator, the Maker of all living things. It is also only as messengers of the Lord seek their understanding from the Lord Himself, from afar—thus not from personal reason, experience, or the past—that they can properly speak on *God's behalf*.

Because he brings inspiration from above, Elihu reveals that he will *ascribe righteousness to [his] Maker*. How rare are such messengers as Elihu, who instead of seeking to justify himself or man has instead chosen that heavenly path, which pursues divine wisdom, ultimately justifying God and ascribing righteousness to Him.

(Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Job 36:4)
For truly my words shall not be false, . . . But strictly true; he would take the utmost care to say nothing but the truth, with the greatest

impartiality and sincerity, so that what was said might be depended upon; truth spoken briefly, clearly, and on so important a subject as the righteousness of God, deserved attention;

Job 36:4 For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee.

Elihu remained confident that he would not err or speak false words about God or Job, as Job's other three companions had done. This was because his source was the Spirit of God and not himself. The Spirit is truth,¹ and only He can reveal where sin actually abides and the real cause of it. In his previous words to Job, Elihu revealed where he knew the true source of all wisdom resided, and it was from the very same God Who imparts His Spirit to man.² It is from this Spirit, this Holy Spirit who descends from above and comes from the spiritual realm, that divine knowledge is imparted to those who woefully lack it. *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding* (Job 32:8).

Job 36:5 Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom.

In his defense of God and His righteousness, Elihu states that the might and strength of the Lord allow Him to be un-

¹ John 15:26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

² I John 5:6 *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*

³ Ezek. 36:26–27 *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

rivalled by any and consequently *despiset* *not any*. Elihu assures Job that the Lord does not despise men and cannot do anything unbecoming toward them beyond what they deserve. Ultimately, the Lord is neither capricious, nor are His judgments concerning man erratic or haphazard. Because of the Lord's great might and His great distance from man, He is above all human vendetta and emotion.

Job 36:6 *He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor.*

(*Pulpit Commentary*, Job 36:6) *He preserveth not the life of the wicked.* There is no special providence over the life of the wicked, as Job had supposed, or pretended to suppose (Job 21:7; comp. Job 12:6).³ On the contrary, God "overturneth" wicked men "in the night, so that they are destroyed; he striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others" (Job 34:25, 26).⁴ *But giveth right to the poor.* The poor and afflicted, the meek and humble, God vindicates.

Assuring Job of God's justice, Elihu refutes Job's claim that the wicked become old and live long lives while also increasing in both influence and power. *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?* (Job 21:7). One needs only to observe the actual lives of sinners to know that no wicked man has a good end. Hence, even if their lives appear momentarily blessed, it is only for a time before divine justice and their own wicked deeds discover them. Elihu also rightfully proclaims that the real blessed are those who are poor, especially those poor in spirit, who have humbled themselves before God and yielded to

His sovereignty over their lives. Because the Lord's deep affection has always been toward the humble and those contrite in spirit, it is foolishness to think that the same God Who adores and cherishes the lowly would ever promote the proud. It is also not the wicked who actually live long lives but rather the humble, who by divine grace are given eternal life as a gift from God. Hence, the wicked should never esteem themselves as blessed, even if they retain some world prosperity, simply because God's eternal life has been withheld from them. It is the meek to whom God looks, not the proud. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Matt. 5:3) To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God; to be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids us, and to die when he commands; to be willing to be in his hands, and to feel that we deserve no favor from him. It is opposed to pride, and vanity, and ambition.

Ultimately, it is only those who are truly poor in heart, possess a contrite spirit, and also tremble at God's Word whom the Lord looks upon with both kindness and favor.⁵ *For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word* (Isa. 66:2).

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Isa. 66:2) *But to this man will I look*—That is, 'I prefer a humble heart and a contrite spirit to the most

³ Job 21:7 *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?*

Job 12:6 *The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.*

⁴ Job 34:25 *Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed. Job 34:26 He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others;*

⁵ Ps. 25:9 *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

Ps. 138:6 *Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.*

Jas. 4:6 *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

magnificent earthly temple' (see the notes at Isaiah 57:15).⁶

That is poor—Or rather 'humble.' The word rendered 'poor' (עָנִי 'ânîy), denotes not one who has no property, but one who is down-trodden, crushed, afflicted, oppressed; often, as here, with the accessory idea of pious feeling Exodus 24:12; Psalm 10:2, Psalm 10:9.⁷ The Septuagint renders it, Ταπεινὸν *Tapeinon*—'Humble;' not πτωχόν *ptōchon* (poor). The idea is, not that God looks with favor on a poor man merely because he is poor—which is not true, for his favors are not bestowed in view of external conditions in life—but that he regards with favor the man that is humble and subdued in spirit.

And of a contrite spirit—A spirit that is broken, crushed, or deeply affected by sin. It stands opposed to a spirit that is proud, haughty, self-confident, and self-righteous.

Job 36:7 *He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted.*

(*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Job 36:7) God does not forsake the godly, as Job implied, but "establishes," or makes them sit on the throne as kings (1Sa 2:8; Ps 113:7, 8).⁸

Job 36:8–10 *And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction;
9 Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.*

6 Isa. 57:15 *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

7 Exod. 24:12 *And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.*

Ps. 10:2 *The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.*
Ps. 10:9 *He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net.*

8 I Sam. 2:8 *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them.*

Ps. 113:7–8 *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; 8 That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.*

¹⁰ *He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

Elihu reveals to Job that if the righteous find themselves bound in affliction, it is because of their own spiritual transgressions. By the Lord's allowing sinners to enter into bondage, it is hoped that they see the error of their ways and humbly realize that their affliction is the result of divine discipline—and therefore recognize their great need to repent of sin in order that God's blessings and favor can return to their lives.

(*Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Job 36:9) The fundamental thought of Elihu here once again comes unmistakably to view: the sufferings of the righteous are well-meant chastisements, which are to wean them from the sins into which through carnal security they have fallen—a warning from God to penitence, designed to work their good.

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Job 36:9) This is Elihu's special doctrine, that God's chastisements are by way of discipline, to reform the future rather than to chastise the past.

Though most will almost universally disagree with this truth, the Lord does use captivity, suffering, and affliction to open men's ears to the guilt of their sin and come to know their need to repent for it. But if sinners do not repent when

I Repent in Dust and Ashes

they are being chastised by the Lord, then there is no hope that He will redeem their souls from the grave.

(*Pulpit Commentary*, Job 36:10) God's chastisements are to be viewed as commands to men to "go and sin no more."⁹

Job 36:11 If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.

True repentance for sin must include leaving the service of sin to pursue spiritual obedience and service to the Lord. Elihu instructs Job that it is obedience and service to the Lord that produce long life and a life filled also with both prosperity and pleasure. Thus it is through subjection and service to the Lord that men's lives are blessed and happiness can fill their souls.

Job 36:12 But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Job 36:12) *But if they obey not*—If those who are afflicted do not turn to God, and yield him obedience, they must expect that he will continue their calamities until they are cut off.

He who stubbornly resists heavenly chastisement, manifested through divine affliction and captivity, will die without any true knowledge of God. To *die without knowledge* is to die without any true understanding of Him, Who alone gives life and breath to all things.¹⁰ It is thus the Lord's heavenly judgment that unrepentant sinners will die without any true exposure to the Lord or the goodness that is alone God's. Hence, those who do not obey the will of God will experience a future of never being allowed to come to truly know God and the beauty of His

divine being as their ultimate and final judgment for rebellion

Job 36:13–14 But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them.

¹⁴ ***They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean.***

Advancing his argument of the godless and how the Lord deals with them, Elihu now draws Job's attention to the hypocrite who refuses to cry to God, even in his affliction, and as a result dies before his time. This no doubt includes the religious hypocrite, who though speaking of God, lives a life totally contrary to Him. Trials also ultimately determine men's true character, which will also determine when they die and where their final resting place will be—in heaven or among the unclean.

Job 36:15 He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression.

For the second time Elihu stresses¹¹ that through affliction and oppression men's ears are opened in order that they may hear God's voice and come to know His will for their lives.

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Job 36:15) *He delivereth the poor in his affliction.*—The point of Elihu's discourse is rather that He delivereth the afflicted by his affliction; He makes use of the very affliction to deliver him by it as a means, "and openeth their ears by oppression."

The Lord's divine hope is always that sinners through adversity will be humbled and come to know their great need for subjection to divine will. For this reason affliction is just one of many means

⁹ John 8:11 *She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

¹⁰ Acts 17:25 *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;*

¹¹ Job 36:10 *He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

whereby the Lord attempts to save the sinner.

Job 36:16 Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait into a broad place, where there is no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table should be full of fatness.

(*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*, Job 36:16) Elihu shows that Job caused the continuance of his own trouble.

How sinners deal with affliction in its beginning will often determine the length of its duration. If sinners also are not brought to know themselves and the sin that lives within them and consequently the role it has played in their bondage, then they will never come to know the real reason for their bondage.

Job 36:17 But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Job 36:17) According to this the meaning is, that if Job held the opinions of wicked people, he must expect that these opinions would be rapidly followed by judgment, or that they would go together, and support each other. This seems to me to be in accordance with the connection, and to express the thought which Elihu meant to convey. It is a sentiment which is undoubtedly true—that if a man holds the sentiments, and manifests the spirit of the wicked, he must expect to be treated as they are.

When any man, even one who thinks himself righteous, aligns himself with the wicked, even in merely speech, he opens the door for divine judgment. Job indeed feared God, but by both sharing and agreeing with the opinions of the wicked, he had unknowingly opened the door to be treated exactly as them.

12 Job 1:3 His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

Job 36:18 Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.

If the Lord is extensively provoked because of men's sin and if affliction does not humble them, then His wrath can very easily take away all their life through a stroke of His hand.

Job 36:19 Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength.

Job had possessed both riches and wealth,¹² yet none of his worldly possessions could prevent the Lord from allowing Satan to touch his life. Hence, just as worldly riches and honor could not prevent Job's affliction, neither would they be able to prevent Job's death if the Lord so willed it. Whatever therefore a man possesses, be it wealth, honor, or privilege, it will not prevent divine justice if sin is committed. Thus, no worldly power or earthly influence can prevent the Lord's spiritual judgment to render to men the bitter fruit of their sin.

(*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, Job 36:19) *Will he esteem thy riches?*—That is God will not regard thy riches as a reason why he should not cut you off, or as a ransom for your forfeited life. The reference here must be to the fact that Job “had been” a rich man, and the meaning is, either that God would not spare him because he “had been” a rich man, or that if he had now all the wealth which he once possessed, it would not be sufficient to be a ransom for his life.

Nor all the forces of his strength—Not all that gives power and influence to a man—wealth, age, wisdom, reputation, authority, and rank. The meaning is, that God would not regard any of these when a man was rebellious in affliction, and refused in a proper manner to acknowledge his Maker.

Job 36:20 *Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place.*

Job had desired death,¹³ which Elihu warns is never something to wish for. The reason for this is that there is a finality in death, which if entered into cannot be reversed. Hence, in death men can no longer repent, nor is there any true hope of being reconciled to God. Yet it was sadly his own death that Job naively wished for. *Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off!* (Job 6:8–9).

(Barnes' *Notes on the Bible*, Job 6:9) The sense is, that Job wished that God would wholly finish his work, and that as he had begun to destroy him he would complete it.

Job 36:21 *Take heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction.*

It is common among the afflicted that death is preferred above living under divine chastisement. Sinners would rather die quickly than have to endure the fruit and consequences of sin.

(*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Job 36:21) *Regard not iniquity.*—Or, perhaps, the special sin of longing for death, for thou hast desired to die rather than bear thine affliction.

Job 36:22 *Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?*

Elihu now instructs Job that if there is to be deliverance from his captivity, it will require the Lord instructing him as He must all the ungodly as to the nature of their sin and how to be delivered from it. *Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way* (Ps. 25:8–9). In regards to pointing out and revealing any sin against God, there is none who can teach like God, Who alone can instruct the sinner as to how he has sinned and the means to be forgiven for it. This eternal truth would very soon be apparent in Job's life, for after Elihu's correction the Lord begins His own spiritual chastisement of both Job's words and his thoughts. *I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee* (Job 42:2).

¹³ Job 16:22 *When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.*

Job 17:13 *If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.*

Job 19:27 *Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.*