

Session 13

Elihu Readies Job to Hear God's Correction

Job 33:15–30

Scriptures

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Job 33:15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

When men are at physical rest, the Lord will often use this time to reveal His will through dreams and visions in the night—that silent time when daily clutter is at its least and individuals are the most open to be taught spiritual truth.

If men lack the spiritual perception to recognize the Lord's voice in the day, then the Lord will often approach them at night, when deep sleep falls upon them, and they cannot suppress the Lord's Spirit from revealing divine will.

Dreams and visions, especially in the Old Testament, were a common means of imparting heavenly instruction. These divine methods of revealing the will of God were often able to make an even more indelible imprint on the soul than even the prophet's words. In fact, even the prophets themselves were instructed through dreams and visions in the night.

Numbers 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

Dreams and visions are very intimate ways that the Lord speaks to men. They originate seemingly inside a man's mind, and as such, they appear to originate from the man himself.

A dream also can be as impactful on the soul as an actual physical experience, able to either build anticipation or dread of future events.

Unbelievers also, like Abimelech, were warned by God in dreams (Gen. 20:3). Pharaoh likewise experienced a vision from God in Joseph's day (though he was himself unable to interpret it [Gen. 41:32]) that warned him of seven plentiful years of crops followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:1-7).

By bringing up dreams and visions of the night Elihu is ready to instruct Job in three ways that the Lord speaks to men.

Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Job 33:15

Elihu now describes the first mode in which God speaks to man: He Himself comes forward as a witness in man's sleep, He makes use of dreams or dream-like visions, which come upon one suddenly within the realm of nocturnal thought (vid., Psychol. S. 282f.), as a medium of revelation—a usual form of divine revelation, especially in the heathen world, to which positive revelation is wanting. . . . In this condition of deep or half sleep, *revelat aurem hominum*, a phrase used of the preparation of the ear for the purpose of hearing by the removal of hindrances, and, in general, of confidential communication, therefore: He opens the ear of men, and seals their admonition, i.e., the admonition that is wholesome and necessary for them.

Through dreams, visions, and revelations which originate from above, the most restless and sometimes troubling nights can prove to be the most life-changing ones.

***Job 33:16–17 Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,
17 That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.***

The wise men who came to worship Jesus after His birth refused to return to Herod and chose another route home because a dream had warned them of impending danger (Matt. 2:11–12).

Joseph also was given revelation through a dream, and was divinely instructed not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (Matt. 1:20). Later Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to flee into Egypt in order to save Jesus (Matt. 2:13–21).

Hence, by dreams and visions believers are both warned and instructed in the Lord's will, just as clearly as if He had spoken to them while they were awake. By this process divine will is revealed, and there remains no doubt that it is the Lord, Who has opened men's ears.

By interceding in men's lives and revealing His will to them, the Lord seeks to prevent the great and dangerous consequence of men pursuing their own will.

It is because of pride that men pursue their own designs, but in the process depart from God's will and eventually even the Lord Himself.

Ultimately, man is his own worst enemy as the pride, lust, and self-will within him can easily lead him to depart from God, in an attempt to satisfy his carnal desires.

It is also common that if men get a taste for pride, thus develop an increasing appetite for it, then there is little that God can do to save them. It is for this reason that the Lord seeks to hide pride from man, lest man's continuing hunger for it, is certain to produce his own death.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 33:17

That he may withdraw man from his purpose—Margin, "work." The sense is plain. God designs to warn him of the consequences of executing a plan of iniquity. He alarms him by showing him that his course will lead to punishment, and by representing to him in the night visions, the dreadful woes of the future world into which he is about to plunge. The object is to deter him from committing the deed of guilt which he had contemplated, and to turn him to the paths of righteousness. Is it unreasonable to suppose that the same thing may occur now, and that God may have a purpose in the dreams which often visit the man who has formed a plan of iniquity, or who is living a life of sin? It cannot be doubted that such people often have alarming dreams; that these dreams are such as are fitted to deter them from the commission of their contemplated wickedness; and that in fact they not unfrequently do it.

Job 33:18 He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

This is the purposed result of God's warnings through dreams and visions; it is to keep men's souls from the pit and their lives from perishing.

It is impossible to place too great an emphasis on this great truth, that men are saved from the pit and future destruction only because the Lord has drawn them away from their pride.

Elihu also would not have addressed the issue of pride in speaking to Job, unless also it was applicable to him. Hence, just because men fear the Lord, does not mean that all human pride has been eradicated from their hearts.

Just because saints possess faith, does not mean that they do not also need to address some level of pride in themselves.

Job 33:19 He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain:

Sickness and pain which force a man to his bed, can easily be a form of chastisement from the Lord. Those who insist on disregarding divine will often will be chastened with internal pain, consuming both their bodies and souls.

If the Lord's commandments are insufficient to draw men's hearts closer to His will, then bodily pain can be purposed to weaken the flesh, consequently warning of the great dangers of sin and rejection of divine will.

Thus, if truth cannot properly grab a man's attention when he is healthy and cause him to repent for his sin, then the Lord hopes that either physical or mental anguish might.

Undoubtedly, pain will weaken the pride of self-will, which is at the core of men abandoning divine will. Bodily affliction is the next divine means that Elihu reveals the Lord will employ to open men's ears, just as dreams and visions are purposed to do.

And though most view sickness, sorrow, and even suffering as punishment from the Lord, in truth it is often meant to be a spiritual deterrent, with the divine hope that if men experience a little of the fruit of sin, they will abandon both embracing and continuing to be governed by it.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Job 33:19–28

Job complained much of his diseases and judged by them that God was angry with him; his friends did so too: but Elihu shows that they were all mistaken, for God often afflicts the body in love, and with gracious designs of good to the soul, as appears in the issue. This part of Elihu's discourse will be of great use to us for the due improvement of sickness, in and by which God speaks to men.

In hindsight we know that the Lord allowed Satan to inflict Job's body so that he might learn an even more important lesson, which is the discovery of a broken and contrite spirit, a spirit also which either through personal affliction or spiritual enlightenment, comes to understand what true humility before the Lord consists of.

Every true child of God must and will be chastened by Him, though the methods used will vary. Job's life is a historical biblical example of this.

Hebrews 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 33:19

Elihu now says, that affliction is a part of a disciplinary government; that it is one of the means which God adopts, when warnings are ineffectual, to restrain people and to bring them to reflection and repentance. This appears to have been a view which was almost entirely new to them.

And the multitude of his bones with strong pain—The bones, as has before been remarked, it was supposed might be the seat of the acutest pain; see the notes at Job 30:17; compare Job 20:11; Job 7:15; Job 30:30. The meaning here is, that the frame was racked with intense suffering in order to admonish men of sin, to save them from plunging into deeper transgression, and to bring them to repentance.

Job 33:20–21 So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat.

²¹ His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out.

The degree to which the body needs to be afflicted before the spirit is broken, and consequently open to repentance, will be determined by the level of stubbornness in the soul. Consequently, some will often need to endure much bodily pain and suffering before they will even remotely consider repenting for their sin.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, Job 33:19–28

Pain is the fruit of sin; yet, by the grace of God, the pain of the body is often made a means of good to the soul. When afflictions have done their work, they shall be removed.

So stubborn is the pride and self-righteousness of sinners that sometimes they will even be willing to sacrifice their own physical lives in order not to have to abandon pride and self-will within their hearts. This was evidenced in Pharaoh, who allowed the destruction of an entire nation, and eventually even the loss of his own physical life, in order to remain holding onto the pride in his heart.

It is also worth noting that he who will not repent for his pride and remains resistant to divine will, is only storing up for himself even greater heavenly wrath and judgment in a day to come.

Romans 2:5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Job 33:22 Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, Job 33:22

To the destroyers; to the instruments of death or destruction, whether it be angels, whom God sometimes useth in those cases; or devils, who have the power of death. Hebrews 2:14; or diseases, which by God's appointment are ready to give the fatal blow.

The Lord often uses angels and heavenly ministers to warn men just as He uses these same celestial beings to carry out His judgments upon the earth.

Job 33:23 If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness:

There is no guarantee that God will send a *messenger* or an *interpreter* of divine will to assist the afflicted, but if it is done, it will always be a reflection of divine grace.

True messengers sent from the Lord are extremely rare, as Elihu reveals that they amount to only *one among a thousand*.

This is evidenced throughout biblical history, when similar in Elijah's day, for every one true prophet of the Lord, there remained four hundred fifty false prophets (I Kgs. 18:22).

Elihu also reveals to Job that there are a rare few who will both defend and uphold God's uprightness.

Benson Commentary, Job 33:23–24

If there be a messenger with him—If there be a prophet or teacher with the afflicted man; *an interpreter*—One whose office and work it is to declare to him the mind and will of God, and his design in this dispensation of his providence, and what is the sick man's duty under it. *One of a thousand*—A person rightly qualified for this great and difficult work, such as there are but very few; *to show unto man his uprightness*—Not man's, but God's uprightness; namely, his justice in inflicting these sufferings, and the sufferer's desert of condemnation and wrath; God's way of pardoning and justifying the penitent; his sincerity and faithfulness to his promises, and the necessity of acquiescing in his will without murmuring or repining, and of walking in the way of faith and holiness. *Then he is gracious unto him*—In that case, or upon the sick man's turning to God in true repentance and faith, God graciously pardons his sins, and saves him, probably from his dangerous disease and from death, but, if not, at least from going down to the pit of hell, and from everlasting destruction.

Job 33:24 Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.

If sinners heed the words of God's messengers, as Nineveh did with Jonah, their lives can be spared. Because also Job repented for his sin and prayed for his friends as God commanded, the Lord found both a ransom and a reason for ending his captivity.

Whenever then there is sincere and genuine repentance for sin, this allows the Lord's grace to save the sinner from hell and its eternal punishments.

Though it cannot be said for certain what the Lord looks for that can be deemed a ransom, it is quite possible that change in countenance, from pride to humility, is what is referred to here, where instead of defending one's sin, a penitent man confesses it.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Job 33:24

I have found—That is, there is a ransom; or, I have seen a reason why he should not die. The idea is, that God was looking for some reason on account of which it would be proper to release the sufferer, and restore him to the accustomed tokens of his favor and that such a ransom had now appeared. There was now no necessity why those sufferings should be prolonged, and he could consistently restore him to health.

A ransom—Margin, or, "an atonement." Hebrew, כֹּפֶר *kôpher*. On the meaning of this word, see the notes at Isaiah 43:3. The expression here means that there was something which could be regarded as a valuable consideration, or a reason why the sufferer should not be further afflicted, and why he should be preserved from going down to the grave. What that price, or valuable consideration was, is not specified; and what was the actual idea which Elihu attached to it, it is now impossible with certainty to determine. The connection would rather lead us to suppose that it was something seen in the sufferer himself; some change done in his mind by his trials; some evidence of acquiescence in the government of God, and some manifestation of true repentance, which was the reason why the stroke of punishment should be removed, and why the sufferer should be saved from death. This might be called by Elihu "a ransom"—using the word in a very large sense.

When men come to know their sin, and consequently confess it, and no longer deny its existence, then the door is opened for divine forgiveness and mercy to be given to them.

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

What this teaches us is that for divine mercy to actually be given, there must first be both a confession and a forsaking of sin. Since it is only he who confesses and forsakes his sin, who shall be a partaker of the mercy of God.

For any true mercy to be given by the Lord, confession and acknowledgment of sin must precede it. Where repentance is not, neither shall divine mercy be found.

Job 33:25–26 His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth:

²⁶ He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.

In speaking these words to Job, Elihu hopes to impart unto him seeds of hope—assuring him that through repentance his body could again regain its vigor and his soul discover a reason for hope.

So great then is the mercy and grace of God that when sin is repented of, and is no longer denied being committed, then spiritual joy can replace bodily and mental pain.

All that Elihu speaks to Job about concerning the effects of true repentance, are directly related to him acknowledging the Lord's uprightness.

Not until sin is repented of will the penitent confess that God, His laws, and His will for man are righteous, and thereby in the process admit his own naturally born unrighteousness.

Job 33:27 He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not;

Before forgiveness and mercy can be granted, sinners must both without hesitation and without denial confess, *I have sinned, and perverted that which was right.*

Sin not only damages the one committing it, but it also perverts the right way of living, by influencing and encouraging others to follow the same ungodly behavior.

To sin against God, is to make crooked the way to God.

Thus, confession of sin demands not only personally confessing one's sin against the Lord, but also an admission of perverting the right way which the Lord demands all men should walk in.

Luke 11:52 Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

Whenever there is a true and sincere repentance for sin, the Lord is justified, His ways are esteemed as right, and men agree with Him that they have broken divine will for their lives.

It is also the confession of sin which encapsulates the great spiritual lessons taught in the book of Job, as Job proved to be exactly the kind of repentant man whom the Lord looks for in the earth, a penitent who would confess his sin, admit his guilt, and in the same natural breath justify his God.

Job 33:28 He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

When there is confession of sin, the Lord's promise is that the soul will be saved from death, and the confessor will see the light of God. This verse reveals the keynote theme of Elihu's reproof, that with sincere confession of sin Job would obtain mercy from God, and thereby come to perceive the true light of Him.

There is also no true path to heaven that does not first begin with confession of sin. This is testified throughout Scripture and evidenced in all whom the Lord has saved.

Thus, there is no true lasting mercy given to the sinner, which does not first require repentance before it is given.

It is also the soul of man, and not merely his body, that the Lord is most concerned with saving.

Jesus instructed His followers to not be fearful of those able to kill the body (man) but rather He Who is able to destroy both the soul and the body (God).

Matthew 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Matt. 10:28

Them which kill the body—That is, people, who have no power to injure the soul, the immortal part. The body is a small matter in comparison with the soul. Temporal death is a slight thing compared with eternal death. He directs them, therefore, not to be alarmed at the prospect of temporal death, but to fear God, who can destroy both soul and body forever.

Job 33:29 Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man,

This process of saving the soul from death, is something that the Lord *worketh oftentimes with man*.

Here we witness the divine agency of God in saving man, whereby the Lord both looks and searches for in the earth those willing to confess their sin, in order that He may deliver them from the pit and from certain eternal death. This truth is most vividly manifested in the ministry of the Son of God.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

From this verse we see the twofold ministry of the Savior, first to *seek* the lost then to *save* them. Before men can be saved, they must be found.

Other translations of verse 29 add more insight into Elihu's instruction.

(ESV) "*Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man,*

(NKJV) "*Behold, God works all these things, Twice, in fact, three times with a man,*

(AMP) [Elihu comments,] “Behold, God does all these things twice, yes, three times, with a man,

(Holman Christian Standard Bible) *God certainly does all these things two or three times to a man,*

The manner in which God warns man and seeks to turn him from the pit has been listed by Elihu as: (1) by dreams and visions in the night, (2) by bodily chastisement and affliction, and (3) by the Lord sending a messenger to instruct the sinner as to the why of his affliction, and how through repentance and confession of sin, forgiveness can be granted. “So the Septuagint understands it, which rendered it, ὁδοῦς τρεῖς *hodous treis*—three ways, referring to the three methods which Elihu had specified.”

Job 33:30 To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

Reiterating the truth of verse 28, Elihu reveals the Lord’s ultimate purpose for bringing chastisement and allowing affliction in the sinner’s life is to recover his soul from death. Hence, if this requires either pain or sorrow in the body, then the Lord deems it well worth it, if the soul can be saved.

The physical body of man is already doomed to inhabit the grave and return to dust; the soul need not be.

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary, Job 33:31

Elihu shows that God’s great and gracious design toward the children of men, is, to save them from being for ever miserable, and to bring them to be for ever happy. By whatever means we are kept back from the [pit,] we shall bless the Lord for them at least, and should bless him for them though they be painful and distressing. Those that perish for ever are without excuse, for they would not be healed.