Job 33:1, 6-7, 12 Hebrews 12:5-11 *(New Living Translation)*  \*Job 35:13-16 … Job 36:15-16, 26-31

***Elihu – the Forgotten Figure (Job Series Pt. 5)***

 Since the beginning of this sermon series on Job, I’ve been looking forward to this message, because my previous studies on Job have focused on Job, his three nay-saying friends, and then God’s big entrance near the end of the book. I don’t know about you, but in the studies I’ve done, none of the authors or lecturers gave time to this figure we find in chapters **32-37** – the forgotten figure of *El-a-hue*.

 Many commentators simply throw Elihu in with the first three as being a judgmental, unhelpful critic. But if you read everything he says, we have a new voice, a new approach, a new answer and a new appeal! There was help for Job in what he said, and help for us also. What Elihu had to say has become part of the oracles of God for us – compare his words to what God says about himself at the end of the book and you’ll see what I mean …

 Elihu comes with less pride and arrogance than Job’s other three friends – and he deals with the subject of suffering from an angle they knew little or nothing about – even though they were all older than him. His depiction of suffering is one big step closer to the NT idea of redemptive suffering, that there is purpose in the trials the faithful go through.

 When Elihu brought in the truth to Job, he also brought in the healing grace of God to the heart. This is always a necessary part in dealing with others; we must not only show men and women where they stand before God because of sin, but also show the wonderful grace of God seen in Christ dying for sinners … Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz had looked on Job’s ruin and condemned him out of hand. Their method did *not* convince the sufferer. Job merely responded by going on the defensive … and gradually, like in quicksand, he just got more and more stuck, as he was pulled down by his pride … But Elihu told the truth about God and then things begin to happen. When Job stops struggling in the quicksand of bad theology, he stops sinking, and he’s offered a line to be pulled out … This prepared the ground of his heart for the still, small voice of God to speak to it … The same lifeline that was offered to Job is offered to us – that’s a whole new way of thinking of Jesus as the Righteous Branch to hold onto …

 Elihu brings the intent of the book into focus – to realize that there is a benevolent purpose of God behind the sufferings endured by his people! Life’s bitterest experiences have God’s gracious purposes behind them … like a piece of embroidery that on one side is just a mess of colors and string going in all different directions, until you turn it over and see the true pattern.

 God’s discipline of his children always has a providential purpose. But our benefit from it will depend upon our response to it. We may despise it – and that’s the road many have gotten lost on – like Cain, after he was rebuked by the Lord regarding his offering, in contrast to his brother Abel’s … We may faint under God’s discipline – like Job did - but Elihu and many of the NT letters, like Hebrews chapter 12, tells us not to … A third reaction is that we can be trained by it, and gain from it. I think I can say with confidence that for Olympians like Simone Biles, Michael Phelps, Katie Ledecky, there are parts of their training regimens that are very unpleasant, and to the outside observer there may be activities we have no idea how they contribute to their overall skill. But the proof is in the end product.

 So, ***instead of allowing the circumstances to come between us and God,*** we should ***keep God between us and our circumstances***. This will make all the difference in the world. Job knew about God in multiple ways, but at this particular point, regarding the value of suffering, he reacted in self-pity and in despair. What chance did he have in dealing with such a great God?! How could a puny man ever get into the presence of God and take up his case before him?!

 Elihu comes, and like a true friend, snaps him out of it … Job’s toxic *trio* of friends tried to stand as judges *over* him. Elihu on the other hand, comes and sits as Job’s *equal* to plead his case and present some further truth concerning God. He sat *with* Job in the fellowship of human sympathy. *At the same time*, he spoke the truth of God to him … In this way, he prefigures Christ.

 Remember how last week we talked about Job looking for a “daysman,” a mediator, someone to take up his case? Jesus is the one Mediator between us and God. Elihu points to that as he comes to serve in the role of daysman … There was no need for Job to fear Elihu, for he was formed out of the clay just as Job was … He was a human being like him, though a messenger from God with God’s word on his lips … What a beautiful picture this is of Christ! Christ, the eternal Son of God, became human in order that he might take our case back to God and represent us before him. He came from God to bring grace and salvation to us … and to bring meaning to our suffering.

 In a sense, Elihu was going to mediate in this manner also. Of course, he didn’t have all the knowledge we have concerning Jesus of Nazareth … but he took the approach that reflects the work of Christ on our behalf! Elihu fits right into the picture, bridging the gap between the emptiness of solutions offered by Job’s accusing friends, and the final discourse delivered by God himself. He showed Job that ***he wasn’t suffering b/c of sin; he was sinning b/c of his suffering***.

 Elihu assured Job that God was still speaking and had something to say to him … It’s often God’s way in dealing with us that when we become subject to him, and admit he has some wise purpose in view, he will bring assurance to our heart and take us through to victory … And this is what Elihu set out to explain to Job. Allowing afflictions to come to his children is *one* of God’s ways of dealing with them. Please note that Elihu did not assure Job that he would be healed if he recognized this fact, but asserted that this was one of God’s methods.

 In the longest chapter in all of the Bible, Ps. 119, the Psalmist says this: “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy Word … It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (v. 71). This expresses total submission on the part of the Psalmist. He admits that if he had not been afflicted he would have gone further astray. Job doesn’t see this yet, but Elihu is striving to open his eyes. In ch. 35 & 36, he is basically saying, “Job, where you’ve gone wrong is that you have been expecting something of God that He does not have to give you. He does not have to answer you. He is greater than you. But you must also recognize that God has a purpose in allowing these things to come to your life. You have not been guilty of the kinds of sins your friends have insinuated, but there is pride and lack of submission to God. *[Slowly]* Job, ***you’re not suffering because of past sin*** *…* ***but you’re sinning now because of your suffering***. Give God his rightful place. Should God have to live on your terms – or should you live on His? Make your choice.”
 Elihu’s hope was that these trials Job was going through would bring him to the end of himself and cause him to turn to the Lord for his help. This is how we have to hear his words at the end of ch. 34: “Would that Job’s afflictions be continued and he be tried to the end … For he adds rebellion in his defiant attitude toward God, and he multiplies his words of accusation against God” (vv. 36-37).

 Unlike the others surrounding Job, Elihu saw that suffering is not exclusively punitive; it may also be corrective. He saw that God allows suffering not always as a penal matter, but for moral ends. Suffering is not necessarily to requite a person for sin, but often to bring that person to an even closer fellowship with God. We see this with people like David in the OT and the Apostle Paul in the NT with his thorn in the flesh … Maybe it’s not the Judge’s rod of punishment, but the Shepherd’s crook to guide us! It’s something designed to push us a little further on in maturing our spiritual lives!

 Elihu brought out one more factor in God’s discipline of his children in chapter 36 – he says, “God delivers the afflicted *in and by* their afflictions, for he gets their attention through adversity. God is leading you away from danger, Job, out of the mouth of distress, into a broad place where there is no perplexity or privation, but a set table full of the best food” (vv. 15-16) … Again, this is a step closer to the NT understanding – *(found in Paul’s letters, Hebrews and James*) – there is often greater spiritual alertness that comes to us as a result of afflictions. Our ears are opened to where we can hear God speak to us better. But more than that, God seeks to bring us out of our distresses, and bring us into a place where there is full provision – that’s what the KJV means when it says, “a table full of fatness.”

 Thank God for Elihu – his admonition calls us to ask *ourselves* important questions about our relationship with God … questions perhaps we hadn’t thought of before. God can use sand-paper people like Elihu to refine, smooth out, and grind away the rough edges of our faith. Oftentimes, the Lord will allow an Elihu to come into our life to keep us humble and dependent on the Lord for our greatest needs and satisfaction.

 We need to constantly be making adjustments, refinements and improvements in our spiritual maturity. Paul wrote, "But speaking the truth in love let us grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Many times we don’t have all the information about our blind spots or areas where we need to admit our shortcomings and learn to consecrate more of our heart, mind, spirit and emotions and desires to the Lord … Before I close, I want to share one last thing Elihu says to Job – because it clearly points to the gospel … listen to this and see if it sounds like something Paul or Peter or one of the Apostles would say – this is Job 33:23ff. – “But if a special messenger from heaven appears, to intercede for a person, and declare that he is upright – God will be gracious and say, “Rescue him from the grave, for I have found a **ransom for his life** *[Did you hear that?! Where else do we hear about a ransom paid to declare us right with God?*] …Elihu continues, “So when that person prays to God, he will be accepted. And God will receive him with joy, and restore him to good standing. He will declare to his friends, “God rescued me from the grave, and now my life is filled with light”! …That’s the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ – written down hundreds and hundreds of years before his birth, and *before that* probably shared in oral tradition for hundreds more! …

 Elihu worshiped the same extravagant God we do - paying the ransom for our indebtedness, planting the spring flowers of new life in the middle of the dour and despairing rocks of Golgotha hill. Think of the special messenger from heaven … who made himself of no reputation; who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of us. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Think of that man, dimly perceived by the young, excited, tempestuous Elihu – *but still perceived* - and know that upon Job’s hill of suffering, he was offered the greatest hope of all.
 However, the matter is not finished yet … for God takes up the subject where Elihu leaves off. This servant of God took the spiritual restoration of Job as far as *he* could go … Now, it is time for God to step in and do what no human being can do. And that will be our focus next week, in the conclusion of our sermon series. For now, remember that we can learn and grow from the advice of the “Elihus” in *our* life … We can entrust ourselves into the hands of God. Allow the Lord to do His work in you by learning from every situation. Learn how to be bigger than any problems with the help of Christ who gives you the strength and power and contentment promised through the Holy Spirit. Amen.