

Sunday May 1st, 2022

Job 32:1-14
“Where did this Guy Come From?”

When Gandhi was studying law at the University College of London, a white professor, whose last name was Peters, disliked him intensely, and always displayed prejudice and animosity towards him. Also, because Gandhi never lowered his head when addressing him, as he expected.... there were always “arguments” and confrontations.

One day, Mr. Peters was having lunch at the dining room of the University, and Gandhi came along with his tray and sat next to the professor. The professor said, “Mr. Gandhi, you do not understand. A pig and a bird do not sit together to eat.” Gandhi looked at him as a parent would a rude child and calmly replied, “You do not worry professor. I’ll fly away,” and he went and sat at another table.

Mr. Peters, reddened with rage, decided to take revenge on the next test paper, but Gandhi responded brilliantly to all questions. Mr. Peters, unhappy and frustrated, asked him the following question. “Mr. Gandhi, if you were walking down the street and found a package, and within was a bag of wisdom and another bag with a lot of money, which one would you take?” Without hesitating, Gandhi responded, “The one with the money, of course.”

Mr. Peters, smiling sarcastically said, “I, in your place, would have taken the wisdom, don’t you think?” Gandhi shrugged indifferently and responded, “Each one takes what he doesn’t have.” Mr. Peters, by this time, was fit to be tied. So great was his anger that he wrote on Gandhi’s exam sheet the word “idiot” and gave it to Gandhi. Gandhi took the exam sheet and sat down at his desk trying very hard to remain calm while he contemplated his next move.

A few minutes later, Gandhi got up, went to the professor and said to him in a dignified but sarcastically polite tone, “Mr. Peters, you signed the sheet, but you did not give me the grade.” No one likes a smart Alec, someone who is adept at teasing or sassing someone. I am very guilty of this habit, and I freely admit that sometimes I go a bit too far, prompting sulks and occasionally a few choice words thrown my way.

Just when we thought that the book of Job is at a stalemate; along comes a young man who throws a monkey wrench into the whole dialogue. All along, Job has been saying that what happened to him was unfair, because he was “blameless”. The issue for Job is now his understanding of these things was becoming a great harm to his spiritual health. If there is no justice in the universe, what hope is there for anyone. If, as Job suggests, God is not treating me fairly, then I am lost.

The three friends have stopped talking, because they know they cannot convince Job that he is in the wrong. Silence has now returned to the little gathering on the garbage heap, where they sit. Then to our great surprise, another character enters the story. His name is Elihu and we are given a bit of his lineage. But the big question before all of us is, where did he come from? He is never mentioned until chapter 22, but he speaks as if he has heard this whole dialogue from the four men.

Many scholars believe that Elihu's speeches are a later addition to the book. Whether that is true or not, there is a great deal of gold in his speeches that we want to gather. It is likely that Elihu was a younger man, not of the age and therefore stature of the other men. Out of deference to these elder statesmen, Elihu has remained silent, but he cannot any more. We read that this young man is burning with anger. He's angry at Job for justifying himself rather than God, and he is angry at Job's friends because they could not provide an answer for Job.

The central issue for Elihu, in all his speeches, is the justice of God. He also strongly believes Job needs an answer to his searching, and Elihu believes he has one. We must not water down Elihu's anger here. He is outraged at Job, "because he was righteous in his own eyes" (v.1) It is also true that there is a valid motive for Elihu's anger. Implied here is that he is angry in a righteous way. It is even mentioned here that God spoke through Elihu.

God's zealousness for his own glory, has been infused into Elihu. I mentioned before that Job sounds like the Pharisee in the parable of Jesus, who believed he was justified before God by his own actions. But let's be careful here, because in 42:7, God himself declares Job's godliness, so he isn't like that Pharisee in the parable. So, shall we see what this upstart young man has to say? I do want to tell you that to manage all this material attributed to Elihu, I have divided his four speeches into three weeks, to better present the depth of material here.

Elihu's first speech 32:6-33:33 centers around a question we may all have asked, and meditated on ourselves. Is God still speaking to us today? Even more specifically; when life is hard, and we do not understand what God is doing, and we long for a "word from the Lord", does God still speak? Elihu takes the roll here as a preparatory prophet, preparing the way for God's speeches yet to come. Much like John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus.

At first read, it seems that the end of Chapter 32 is just a waste of our time, until we get to the meat in chapter 33, but we need to stop and let the words sink into us. In this beginning part of his speeches, Elihu explains why he is different from Job's other three friends. Namely, and maybe surprising, that Elihu's authority, like all prophets, comes from God. Elihu was very timid to speak until now.

Elihu was a younger man, without the years of experience the other men had. In his culture, he knew his place in the company of these elders. But Elihu says that God's Spirit is the source of his wisdom, The very "breath of the Almighty" can from time-to-time issue forth from a person. Traditions, which the other three men are really relying on, is never as authoritative as God's Spirit. Just because these men have always thought the way they do, for many years, does not mean they are wise.

Verse 11 tells us that Elihu stays with these men, waiting for someone to refute Job and answer him with real wisdom. But Elihu points out that his waiting for these three friends to challenge Job properly, was a misguided hope. God's wisdom is needed here, because the wisdom of these men is lacking any substance. Until Elihu speaks, the men sit in an awkward silence, waiting for something to end the impasse between them. So, Elihu speaks, because he can hold back no longer. He needs to speak, lest the thoughts and words eat him up inside.

He feels like a man who has a bloated stomach, or a wineskin swelled by the gases new wine produces. Like many prophets after him, Elihu finds God's words burning within him. So, his first speech is building a contrast between Elihu and the other men. "But, now hear my speech, O Job, and listen to my words." Elihu prefaces his words by telling Job that he is speaking in all sincerity. Job can trust his motives.

Elihu speaks with the Spirit of the one who made him. He cautions Job to brace himself for what is to come. The words may be hard words like those other three men, but Job need not be afraid. Elihu first summarizes what Job has said in his speeches. First, Job has claimed he is not guilty before God. Next. Job accuses God of targeting Job unfairly and treating Job as his enemy, finding reasons to attack him.

God has exposed Job to public ridicule and disgrace. Job claims God has secretly watched him and plotted against him. The implication of these two things Job has said, is that God had treated Job unfairly and this is what make Elihu angry and prompts him to speak. Elihu begins with the main premise of all his speeches, and that is "God is greater than man". I should first of all note for you that never does Elihu say that Job's troubles are because of his sin.

Elihu will however, say that Job has sinned by saying wrong things about God and his situation. In Elihu's eyes, Job does not have a secret unconfessed sin in his life, it's that he has spoken erroneously out of his pain. Job has complained that God is not speaking to humans, but Elihu disagrees. Verse 14 indicates that Elihu believes God speaks in multiple ways. The problem is people do not perceive his speaking, or do not pay attention to it.

Elihu then expands on this thought about God speaking, by saying that God speaks in two ways at least. The first way God speaks is through our conscience. Elihu describes different depths of sleep from napping to full on REM sleep, in which God speaks to the conscience of people. People know God is speaking, but this terrifies them so they close their ears. Specifically. Elihu is talking about God frightening people about the sin they have in their lives.

God speaks to turn us away from doing what is wicked., and to humble us so we do not become prideful. This is akin to the Apostle Paul who spoke of the "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" to harass him. All in an effort to keep Paul, or anyone else, from the decay sin brings into one's life. His voice calls in the night to turn us around, or repent, before we get further away from the narrow path.

Yet, Elihu also says something that really piques our interest. Elihu contends that God speaks in our suffering. Suffering is a rebuke, Elihu states. A way of calling to let go any delusions of being governed by our self-will. C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful little book called, *The Problem with Pain*. There is a famous passage where he writes basically what Elihu is saying to Job. Lewis writes...

The human spirit will not even begin to try and surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows something is wrong when he is being hurt...We can rest contentedly in our sins...

But pain insists upon being attended to, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. (Pg. 80-81) I would contend that pain is our alarm system. To see another perspective on the value of pain read, “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” by Phillip Yancy, who unpacks the incredible work and insight of the late Dr. Paul Brandt.

Elihu, however, does not end his speech with just how God speaks to us, but he goes on in length to talk about God’s gracious purpose in rescuing us. Job has been calling for a mediator and Elihu states that we all have someone to speak for us. Like the angel in Zechariah 31:5) who spoke against Satan in his accusation of the high priest, we all have angels who also stand for us but more importantly, we have God in Christ to stand for us.

Elihu paints the picture of what we might refer to as “our guardian angel”. Many people believe, or want to believe, that we all have one. Our mediator calls out to have the one suffering to be pulled from the pit. That a ransom is paid. A substitute is offered to save the sufferer from danger. This is something none of us can do on our own. God must redeem us. Suffering reminds us of our need for God.

Then in verses 26-28, Elihu says that the sufferer, who is redeemed, now can do nothing else than to praise their redeemer, namely for us, God in Christ. Elihu concludes his words by repeating his points. Whether God speaks through the misery of a guilty conscience, or the pain of suffering, he does so repeatedly and persistently with the goal of rescuing people from the pit and giving them the “light of life”.

Elihu is not saying Job is concealing his sins, but Job is wrong in thinking God is not speaking to him. Job is suffering, but this suffering is precisely God speaking to him. In other words; we may think God is not talking to us in our times of suffering, but our suffering may be God speaking loudly and persistently to us.

Job has said all along that the greatest pain in his ordeal is the absence of God’s voice, but God has been speaking all along, according to Elihu. He begs Job to let this experience, as horrible as it is, be used by a gracious God to redeem him and restore him. Job needs to put aside his pride in his own efforts at a “blameless character”, and see the righteousness of God as the only source of his hope.

I came across a beautiful poem that captures how we should think about our struggle from the pen of Ella Wheeler Wilcox called Gethsemane. These are her words

Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams
Bridged over by our broken dreams;
Behind misty caps of years,
Beyond the great salt fount of tears,
The garden lies. Strive as you may,
You cannot miss it in your way.
All paths that have been or shall be,
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.

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All those who journey, soon or late,
Must pass within the garden's gate;
Must kneel alone in darkness there,
And battle with some fierce despair.
God pity those who cannot say,
"Not mine but thine" who only pray,
"Let this cup pass," and cannot see
The purpose in Gethsemane.

May we all begin to see the purpose in Gethsemane.