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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Ascribe Righteousness to Your Maker

Job 36-37

What is the most awesome display of weather you have ever seen?

When we were missionaries in Japan, I went with my brother-in-law to the coastline to see the after-effects of a massive tsunami... basically, their version of a hurricane. The wind had whipped the sea into a frothy frenzy and one angry wave after another pummeled the rocky coast as we watched... the clouds were spectacular, mounting higher and higher into the heavens with differing layers of dark and light clouds

The clouds seemed to be alive... writhing and moving and undulating and crashing into one another

The sound of the wind and its evident force was terrifying and it was a struggle to maintain our footing on the rocky cliff where we were standing

All this was the AFTERMATH... the full force of the storm had already passed

I have seen many breathtaking displays of weather that would vie for the top spot in my memory; I saw an electrical storm rip the heavens over Butte, Montana... and I realized why they call Montana "Big Sky Country"... the sky DID in fact seem bigger than anything I'd ever seen before. But the terror of the electrical storm was greater in that I saw the traverse of a single lightning bolt from east to west just like Jesus said of his second coming glory:

Matthew 24:27 as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

As we come to Job 36-37, we come to the final speech of Elihu, the mysterious man of God who comes to speak on God's behalf. He will use the staggering power of God displayed in clouds, wind, thunder and lightning to remind Job and all of us to trust God, especially in times of affliction.

Today, we will find that the basic message from Elihu in these last two chapters is essentially the same as what Almighty God himself is about to say in Job 38-41

Central thesis: God is a wise and loving teacher. He uses creation to teach us his nature, and then uses trials to teach us our sinfulness and dependency on him. Therefore, the best we can do in times of suffering is humble ourselves before him and trust him more than ever.

Let's divide up the two chapters:

- Ascribe Righteousness to Our Maker (36:1-4)
- God Uses Suffering to Test Us (36:5-15)
- God is Wooing Us, But So Is Evil (36:16-21)
- God Uses Creation to Teach Us His Nature (36:22-37:18)
- Consider God's Wonders and Revere Him (Job 37:19-24)

I. Ascribe Righteousness to Our Maker (36:1-4)

Job 36:1-4 Elihu continued: ² "Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said in God's behalf. ³ I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker. ⁴ Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you.

A. Theodicy: the Justification of God

1. The whole problem of evil and suffering is the focus of an aspect of theology called “theodicy”... the “justification or vindication of God”
2. Human suffering is one of the most offensive issues for those who question the existence of God
3. They readily accuse God of non-existence because of the magnitude of human suffering in the world
4. They say “It is impossible for a God who is wise, and loving, and powerful to exist when so many people suffer so greatly.” Either God is not wise, or he is not loving, or he is not powerful.
5. So... Christians seeking to win a lost world to faith in Christ have sought to defend the honor of God... to vindicate his ways to a vicious and skeptical world—this is called THEODICY... the “justification (vindication) of God”
6. Amazingly, that is the very thing Elihu is determined to do here

Job 36:3 I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

7. Notice he speaks of God as “my Maker”... that is appropriate, because the centerpiece of his evidence will be God’s activity in creation... in MAKING and SUSTAINING and RULING OVER everything in the universe

B. Ascribing Righteousness to Your Maker

1. This is the main idea this morning
2. That you, dear Christian brother and sister, you... when you go through immensely painful trials, that you will ascribe RIGHTEOUSNESS to your Maker...
3. The God who knit you together in your mother’s womb and has sustained your life every day since, the God who not only made you but made ALL THINGS in the universe... that God is RIGHTEOUS... he doesn’t make mistakes!

C. Elihu’s preface... asking for patience, claiming to speak for God

1. “Bear with me a little longer...”

2. What he wants to do is speak *on God’s behalf*... to speak a word in defense of the God of Creation

3. Elihu claims to get his “*wisdom from afar*”... really from God himself; he claims that his words are not false, even claims to be “one who is perfect in knowledge”... basically, he is Prophet, speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit

4. And we will see so much similarity between Elihu’s approach here and God... both Elihu and God use natural theology—what may be learned from creation about God’s nature—to make their point: a human being should never question God or accuse him of wrongdoing, even in the midst of great suffering

II. God Uses Suffering to Test Us (36:5-15)

A. Almighty God Does Not Despise Any Person

Job 36:5 “Behold, God is mighty, and does not despise any; he is mighty in strength of understanding.

1. It would be easy for suffering people to accuse God of playing with people—like a vicious boy who delights in tormenting insects

2. God is mighty, says Elihu... more mighty and powerful than we can possibly imagine... but he despises NO ONE—every human being is created in his image, and he esteems each one with eternal seriousness

3. Most mighty rulers and nobles in this world LORD IT OVER the lowliest of men—they could not be bothered even looking at them or answering their cries for attention

4. God despises no one; and he is mighty in his understanding... he studies everything on earth, including all human beings

5. Just because we are so limited and puny in our strength and our minds, God doesn’t despise anyone

Think about how angry Jesus was with his disciples when they rebuked those who brought children to Jesus...

Mark 10:14-16 He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

B. God Cuts Off the Wicked (vs. 6)

1. While Job laments that some wicked do in fact escape justice (Job 21) in this world, God always brings the hammer down eventually

C. But Concerning the Righteous: God Uses Suffering to Teach Them

Job 36:7-10 He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever. ⁸ But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, ⁹ he tells them what they have done-- that they have sinned arrogantly. ¹⁰ He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil.

1. God exalts righteous people and puts them in key positions in society... even better, he exalts them eternally in heaven!
2. BUT sometimes he afflicts people with great suffering
 - a. Elihu likens it to being in chains... held fast by strong cords
 - b. Think of someone battling cancer or another dread chronic disease... it's like they have invisible chains on their hearts... unable to soar and sing and fly and enjoy life, they sink down in pain and suffering
3. God brings chains of affliction on people to expose their sinfulness
 - a. Sometimes it comes as a direct chastisement for sin—Elihu speaks of the people sinning arrogantly
 - b. God convicts them, takes them back to their own actions, makes them take ownership of their choices

Job 36:10 He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil.

- c. When the trial comes, the best thing we can do is ask God what sin he is disciplining us for

D. The Trial Sifts People and Tests Them

1. Basically the suffering puts people at the fork in the road
2. God is testing them to see how they will respond

Job 36:10-12 He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. ¹¹ If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. ¹² But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge.

3. Trials come to all people... righteous and wicked alike; and how you respond to the trial shows a lot about the state of your soul

E. Wicked People Stubbornly Refuse to Cry to God

Job 36:13-14 "The godless in heart harbor resentment; even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help. ¹⁴ They die in their youth, among male prostitutes of the shrines.

1. Many say "There are no atheists in foxholes"... this is not universally true
2. Some godless people, in the midst of severe trials, double-down on their hatred of God... they become even more angry at him, venting their rage and shaking their fists at heaven

Isaiah 8:21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.

F. But Godly People Enduring the Exact Same Trials Use Them Wisely

Job 36:15 But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.

Notice!! God speaks to them in their affliction...

God is telling them many things... he is using the affliction to communicate with them

As the next section says, God is WOOING them toward himself

III. God is Wooing Us, But So Is Evil (36:16-21)

A. In this Section, We Get Competing Enticements... Competing Voices

1. On the one hand, God is wooing his people to come closer to him, to draw near to him, to ask him for forgiveness and for help
2. But on the other hand, evil is alluring you and pulling on you and enticing you as well, with a deadly siren call of rebellion
3. Who will you listen to? The future of your soul depends on your answer!

B. God Wooing His People

Job 36:15-16 But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction. ¹⁶ "He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.

1. In your suffering, God is speaking his wisdom, purpose and love
2. He is wooing you to himself... as though he is talking you down from the ledge of rebellion and destruction... from the "jaws of distress" to a place of richness, a table laden with his love
3. Ultimately this is fulfilled in heaven's banquet table—eternal joy in the presence of God

C. BUT Evil is Alluring as Well

1. Elihu speaks directly to Job... he is not accusing him here of wrongdoing, but is warning him not to give into resentment and suffer the judgment of rebels

Job 36:17-21 But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you. ¹⁸ Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside. ¹⁹ Would your wealth or even all your mighty efforts sustain you so you would not be in distress? ²⁰ Do not long for the night, to drag people away from their homes. ²¹ Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction.

2. Suffering people sometimes feel tempted to question all the disciplines and self-denial they have lived under in serving God...
“What good is it to serve God? If this is how you treat your faithful servants, no wonder that you have so few of them!”

3. So Elihu is warning Job, DON'T GIVE IN TO THAT ALLURING CALL OF REBELLION

Elihu now turns to his main message... the God of creation gives you everything you need to endure this affliction... he is worthy of your full trust

IV. God Uses Creation to Teach Us His Nature (36:22-37:18)

A. Elihu Fills Job's Mind (and Ours) With Majestic Thoughts of God

B. First, God is an Exalted Teacher

Job 36:22 "God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?"

1. The picture of God as a Teacher in the midst of afflictions is powerful
2. But long before we are afflicted, God has been teaching us himself in creation since the moment he formed us in our mother's womb
3. God is constantly teaching his people who He is... His own glory, his own nature, his own purposes... this is the subject matter of the universe and every day we live in it

C. God's Independent Glory

1. God is independent of all human ADVICE or JUDGMENT

Job 36:23 Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, 'You have done wrong'?

All great kings have had an array of counsellors... wise men who stood in the king's court, in his presence, to give him advice

Not God!

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way?

2.The point of the universe is that God's glory would be on display and seen, studied, savored, and celebrated by his people

Job 36:24-26 Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. ²⁵ All mankind has seen it; men gaze on it from afar. ²⁶ How great is God-- beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out.

For the rest of this chapter and on throughout the next, Elihu waxes eloquently concerning the glories of God in creation

D.The Display of the Glory of God in Creation

1.Natural theology: what may be learned about God from creation

Romans 1:20 Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so people are without excuse

2.God is the infinite, the unsearchable Creator and sustainer of everything in the universe, visible and invisible

3.He is all-sufficient, not needing anything from his creation... but giving to the creation everything it needs for its existence and the function he has ordained for it

E.Clouds, Rain, Thunder, Lightning

Job 36:27-30 "He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; ²⁸ the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. ²⁹ Who can understand how he spreads

out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? ³⁰ See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea.

1. Clouds really are astonishing!!

Have you ever spent a lazy summer afternoon lying on your back in a meadow and watching the clouds... looking at their fascinating shapes... seeing different animals in them, maybe, like an elephant's head with a trunk; or perhaps the shape of a sailing vessel, or a mountain range with various peaks...

Though they look like fluffy whiffs of cotton, they actually are immensely heavy... they are made up of evaporated water, and they rise up from the surface of the earth carried by thermal columns of heated air; the average cumulus (fair weather) cloud can weigh well over **one million pounds**; and a serious thunderstorm can have clouds packing **billions of pounds** of water... how then does it defy gravity and float above the surface of the earth?

2. God's storms are terrifying

Job 36:29-30 Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? ³⁰ See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea.

3. By these clouds, God controls the water of the earth, and even the direction of human history

Job 36:31-33 This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance. ³² He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. ³³ His thunder announces the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach

4. God GOVERNS NATIONS by the weather! How many battles have been dictated by a sudden deluge that affected troop movements? How much human history has been determined by rainfall that does or doesn't happen, and FAMINE that may result?

F. The Terror of God's Thunder and Lightning

Job 37:1-5 "At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. ² Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. ³ He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. ⁴ After that comes the sound of his roar; he thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back. ⁵ God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.

1. Elihu acknowledges that his own heart pounds whenever he sees an electrical storm
2. Thunder and lightning go together... for thunder is caused by the rapid expansion of the air surrounding the path of a lightning bolt
3. Lightning is the discharge of static electricity from the clouds to the earth, and a lightning bolt takes only a few thousandths of a second to make its journey to the surface of the earth... but its effects are overwhelming—heating the air around the bolt of lightning to as high as 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit... roughly five times hotter than the surface of the sun
4. The combination of thunder and lightning always has the power to strike terror into the hearts of people... the wicked Emperor Caligula was so terrified of thunder and lightning that he would run into a corner or hide under a bed; it was a severe electrical storm that caused Martin Luther to cower in terror in an open field and then make a vow to become a monk if he would only survive the storm
5. Brilliant, jagged, blinding LIGHT coupled with overpowering deep rolling SOUND... our senses reel with the power, and they are designed by God among other things to strike terror in the hearts of people and remind them how small we are and how powerful he is

God used it at Mount Sinai to bring terror to the people:

Exodus 19:16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.

Ten times in the Book of Revelation, thunder and lightning are used to show the terrifying power of the presence of God:

Revelation 11:19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm

6. Elihu calls thunder the “voice of the Lord”

G. God’s Control of Weather

Job 37:5-14 God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding. ⁶ He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth,' and to the rain shower, 'Be a mighty downpour.' ⁷ So that all men he has made may know his work, he stops every man from his labor. ⁸ The animals take cover; they remain in their dens. ⁹ The tempest comes out from its chamber, the cold from the driving winds. ¹⁰ The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. ¹¹ He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. ¹² At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. ¹³ He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love. ¹⁴ "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders.

1. The range of precipitation, all of which God controls

- a. First, the volume of rain... differing levels: a sprinkle, a spring shower, a downpour, sheets of rain, “raining cats and dogs”, like a carwash, a deluge... all different words for differing quantities of rain
- b. Second, the temperature... sometimes warm, sometimes colder, sometimes freezing... producing ice, making the rivers and lakes freeze over
- c. Third, the types of precipitation: rain, snow, hail... hailstorms can be so damaging, they can destroy a whole year’s crops like in the plague on Egypt
- d. Third, the effect of the precipitation: men have to stop work, animals take cover

2. God uses clouds to both PUNISH men and also to water the earth and show his love (vs. 13)
3. All of these are done at the will and bidding of God... for his inscrutable purposes
4. Man is powerless over the weather and must stop their work in certain weather conditions
5. So... listen Job and consider the wonders of God!

H. God's Activity in Creation Should HUMBLE Man

Job 37:14-18 "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. ¹⁵ Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? ¹⁶ Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge? ¹⁷ You who swelter in your clothes when the land lies hushed under the south wind, ¹⁸ can you join him in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze?"

1. This is the very approach God is about to take with Job in chapters 38-41... the limitations of Job's power and knowledge!
2. Such a mighty God of creation is worthy of our adoration and trust, even in times of our own suffering!

V. Consider God's Wonders and Revere Him (Job 37:19-24)

Job 37:19-24 "Tell us what we should say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness. ²⁰ Should he be told that I want to speak? Would any man ask to be swallowed up? ²¹ Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. ²² Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. ²³ The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. ²⁴ Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?"

A. Elihu Wants Job to Stop Preparing His Case Before God

1. Remember that again and again Job has said how eager he is to argue to God's face his own innocence

2. He thinks he can walk boldly into God's presence and defend his honor... but the God of thunder and lightning, the God who sends every drop of rain that has ever fallen on earth, the God of creation and of glory will not be impressed by any of Job's arguments or his credentials!
3. Would not a mortal man be swallowed up in the infinite sea of God's glory
4. We cannot even look at the sun directly when the clouds do not shroud its full brightness... we would be instantly blinded...; but God's glory is greater than that of the sun
5. God comes out of the North in golden splendor, riding on the clouds of awesome glory, speaking in a voice of thunder
6. Almighty God is infinitely above our reach

Hear that, Job! Hear that, all suffering people! God's righteousness is PERFECT

B. Final Advice: Fear Him, Revere Him, Fall Down Before Him!!

ESV Job 37:24 Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit

VI. Lessons

A. Central Lesson is Clear: The God of this Glorious Creation is Worthy of Your Full Trust

1. When you are suffering affliction, draw near to him in humble worship and humbly ask him for relief and for wisdom and endurance
2. He will give you what you need
3. As Elihu said, realize that God is a TEACHER, and he is using creation to teach you now, and the affliction to teach you then
4. And what should you learn?

- a. First, that you are a creature and he is the creator... he is infinitely above you
 - b. Second, that you are a sinner in need of repentance and forgiveness
5. Use the trial to come closer to God than ever
- a. Trials SIFT people into wheat and chaff... if you are a child of God, you will be revealed to be genuine by how you respond to the trial
 - b. Trust God that his purposes for you are wise and loving
6. Beware of evil! Beware of murmuring against him, seething in rebellion, questioning his goodness or his power or his love or his justice

B. Trust Christ

- 1. God sent his Son to save sinners like us! Christ's death on the cross was to deliver us from the just wrath of God for our sins
- 2. When we are being disciplined for sins, let God show you your evil works... own them... and use them to flee again to Christ
- 3. As we go through trials, we should realize what a faithful high priest we have who is aware of our weaknesses

Hebrews 2:17-18 [Christ is] a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

C. Look Forward to the Full Revelation of Christ

We have spoken today about the glory of clouds... God often used clouds to present his glorious presence... and so it is fitting for Christ to be unveiled, revealed to the whole earth on clouds of glory at the Second Coming

Matthew 24:30 At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the

Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.