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Sermon Notes

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## **God Reigns With Perfect Justice**

### **Job 34-35**

Elihu's second and third speeches... focusing on Job's central and scandalous accusation that God has been unjust toward him.

God will clearly put Job in his place on this very issue at the end of the book, and no human being could ever do that better than God himself. But Elihu's arguments and lofty words are extremely powerful... and they help put us in our place as well.

Every one of us thinks too lowly of God... we struggle with conceiving of God's absolute sovereignty and wrestle with how we feel about that. We find fault with him in little ways, and some of us in some very big ways. At the back of our minds, there is always some question of the justice of God. We see so many things wrong on earth – so much injustice, so many sinful men getting away with murder – and we wonder how God runs this planet... how he can be so silent when there is so much obviously wrong on earth.

How much more do we question the justice of God were anything dire to happen to us or our loved ones? Then would the complaints and the murmurings and questionings break loose into open assertions of doubt and words of open rebellion.

And yet none of us has ever had anything happen even remotely close to what Job experienced... the instantaneous loss of all his wealth, all ten of his children, and then his health.

And yes, Job did indeed begin well:

***Job 1:22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.***

And as he later said to his wife who urged him to “Curse God and die!”:

***Job 2:10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.***

Yet, as we've noted, trials go on much longer than we want them to... they wear on us, break us down through their chronic nature. And when Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar began pressing him with their theology – that Job was suffering by God's direct judgment on his sins... and since Job's suffering was so staggeringly great, then his sins must be proportionally great as well... when they did this, it tempted Job and pressed him to begin complaining about God. He seems to have accepted their basic theological structure – that massive suffering happens on earth because God works it, and God only does that as a punishment for evil – but since he knows very well there is no great sin in his life, God must have made a massive mistake... a great injustice in his case:

***Job 19:6-8 know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. <sup>7</sup> "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice. <sup>8</sup> He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness.***

Job concludes his defense with a masterpiece (Job 31) in which he goes into lengthy detail on the nature of his righteousness... which consisted of absolute sexual purity, wise and moral leadership of his household, just and sacrificial care for the poor and needy, freedom from all idolatry, management of his wealth in a just and righteous way... Job 31 – the portrait of a truly righteous man who walked continually in the fear of the Lord.

And amazingly, that was all TRUE! For God had boasted about Job to Satan:

***Job 1:8 "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."***

So, Job's friends were silent and could say nothing more because Job had bested them. Job was utterly convinced of his own righteousness and that God had wronged him.

Suddenly another man speaks up... Elihu... a man we had not even known existed, but who (it seems) was listening to all the dialogues between Job and his friends... and who was angry, righteously angry, that the honor of God was so impugned:

***Job 32:2-3 But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. <sup>3</sup> He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him.***

Last week, we looked at Elihu's introduction, and then his first speech – Job 32-33. Elihu had waited to speak because he was younger than the three friends and wanted age to speak first. But he was bursting with zeal for the glory of God, and the time had come for him to erupt in a torrent of words. His contribution last time brought a new perspective to the book of Job – that the basic concept that the only possible explanation for suffering was God's punishment for sin – was inadequate. There is another explanation – namely, that God uses suffering, including sickness, to warn people from sin and to protect them from the ultimate consequences for sins:

***Job 33:16-18 God may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, <sup>17</sup> to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, <sup>18</sup> to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.***

Now, in Job 34-35, we continue to follow Elihu's concepts... and we will see him present the infinite majesty of God's kingly reign in ways that should warn us against sin and pride as well.

While Elihu's words are majestic, we are still left wondering if he has missed some key aspects of God's character... at times, we will

see Elihu evolve into the same perspective and theology as the friends – the law of sowing and reaping (you get what you deserve) – and to deny the uniqueness of Job’s situation – a stunningly righteous man singled out by God for stunningly devastating judgments.

So, as profound as Elihu often is, we will find that only God alone can give the full and final answers to the problem of suffering – and he doesn’t do it here in the Book of Job, but in the Person of Christ, his only begotten Son... in his death, resurrection, and Second Coming.

## I. Elihu Judges Job

### A. Elihu Demands to Be Heard

***Job 34:1-2 Then Elihu said: <sup>2</sup> "Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning.***

1. He is directly addressing not only Job, but the three friends whose failure to correct Job was so offensive to him
2. He wants them to listen him as carefully as he listened to their lengthy speeches

### B. The Ear Tests Words

***Job 34:3-4 For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. <sup>4</sup> Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good.***

1. Speech is a fundamental gift from the Lord... part of what separates man from animals... part of what it means to be created in the image of God
2. But words have to be tested like food has to be tasted
3. Think of a master chef running a five-star restaurant in Paris... he samples the sauces and the dressings and the concoctions of all the sou-chefs under his direction... his skillful tasting enables him to

correct the heat at which the sauce is being stirred in the saucepan or the exact blending of the spices in the salad dressing or the freshness of the ingredients in the souffle

4. So are we supposed to be when it comes to sampling words... arguments... logic and reasoning and illustrations and applications... is it true or is it false

5. Helping us Christians with that in this New Covenant era is the indwelling Holy Spirit

***1 John 2:20-21 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.***

The indwelling Holy Spirit helps all true Christians to DISCERN truth in a teaching... you sample it like a tongue tastes food, and you can compare it to what you already know to see if it is true

6. Now, this sampling of words has been essential to the whole study of the Book of Job... it is especially needful because God himself speaks disparagingly about Job's statements, and then about the three friends

7. So we have had to sample the speeches in every case, testing every phrase to see if its true... often the problem is not that an assertion is absolutely false, but just that it's imbalanced or misapplied

8. Now, we have to do that with Elihu as well!!

#### C. Job's Claim

***Job 34:5-6 "Job says, 'I am innocent, but God denies me justice. <sup>6</sup> Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.'***

#### D. Elihu's Harsh Judgment of Job

***Job 34:7-9 What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water? 8 He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with wicked men. 9 For he says, 'It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God.'***

1. It seems that Elihu is going the same way as the three friends in his harsh judgments of Job
2. What does this statement even mean... that Job “drinks scorn like water?” Does it mean Job saturates himself in a scornful attitude and scorn comes pouring forth from him—by which he is referring to Job’s scornful attitude toward God; or does it refer to how Job has been the brunt of so much scorn from his three friends and from the entire community that knew him, but it doesn’t seem to phase him—he goes right on questioning God’s justice and claiming to be innocent
3. AND it seems Elihu is saying in questioning Job’s justice, he is associating with the wicked who openly denigrate God
4. According to Elihu, Job is acting like a wicked man when he implies that there really is no difference in the outcome between the righteous and the wicked... if Job, the righteous has such a terrible set of afflictions, and the wicked seem to get away with murder, then there really is no cause and effect in the world... and Elihu says that makes Job a partner to the wicked... for he says **“It profits a man nothing to try to please God!”**
5. In this sense, Elihu seems to be reverting to the approach taken by Job’s friends who see Job increasingly in dark terms

## II. Elihu Exalts God as Sovereign King

In this section, Elihu spins marvelous eloquence about the perfect justice and omniscience that is the foundation of his righteous throne in heaven. Though Elihu’s own motives and understanding are imperfect, yet we who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century American scene tend to be profoundly cavalier and informal about God... we need all the help we can get to have a proper fear of the Lord — Elihu’s words will help

### A. God’s Perfect Hatred of Evil (34:10-12)

***Job 34:10-12 "So listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. <sup>11</sup> He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. <sup>12</sup> It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.***

It is impossible for God to do evil...

***1 John 1:5 God is light and in him there is NO DARKNESS AT ALL!***

***Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.***

So, according to Elihu, anything God has done to Job must be perfectly justified. Job is getting what he deserves. Now it seems again Elihu is no different than the friends. But of course we know that Job's situation is not what it appears... Job's sufferings are precisely because he is so holy and righteous... not because he is the most wicked man on earth.

BUT in the end, in heaven, when we review all of God's judgments, we will find that God acted with perfect justice in every case... and that unrepentant sinners do indeed get paid back for what they have done:

***Romans 2:6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."***

B. God's Authority Is Independent from All Creatures (34:13)

***Job 34:13 Who appointed him over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world?***

This is tied to the aseity of God... that God derives his being and his authority "from himself" not from any creatures. We never voted God into office, and we have no power to vote him out of office. No creature gave God his throne... it is his by virtue of his person and his work in creating the entire universe... he made it, so he rules over it absolutely!

C. God's Absolute Power Over Life and Death (34:14-15, 20)

***Job 34:14-15 If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, <sup>15</sup> all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust.***

***Job 34:20 They die in an instant, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and they pass away; the mighty are removed without human hand.***

1. In God every living thing on earth has its being

***Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'***

***Hebrews 1:3 The Son ... is sustaining all things by his powerful word.***

2. It is completely dependent on God's purpose and will whether any man continues to exist or not for another second... and that is true of all creatures he has made

***Psalm 104:29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.***

3. God has created a NEEDY universe... entirely dependent on him for its continued existence

4. So, if God wanted to kill a single individual or a whole nation alike, he could do it with no preparation at all... as he said to Pharaoh

***Exodus 9:15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.***

5. It says in verse 20 the mighty are removed without human hand... meaning God doesn't need any allies at all if he wanted to kill anyone or even any nation

6. When God sent out the Angel of the Lord and he killed 185,000 Assyrian troops in a single night, we should realize that the term "the Angel of the Lord" often referred to the preincarnate Christ in the Old Testament era... if so, then Christ killed all those Assyrian troops by himself without a single angel to help him



7. Jonathan Edwards's famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" zeroed in on this powerful ability of God to take life at any moment, without any preparation

"It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand. It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages, shows this is no evidence, that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell..."

D. God's Total Impartiality (34:16-20)

***Job 34:16-19 "If you have understanding, hear this; listen to what I say. 17 Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One? 18 Is he not the One who says to kings, 'You are worthless,' and to nobles, 'You are wicked,' 19 who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? 20 They die in an instant, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and they pass away; the mighty are removed without human hand.***

1. God could not rule the universe as he does if he hated justice... although human history is marred by many tyrants who hated justice and yet ruled with an iron hand

2. But God is nothing like them at all!

3. God's love for justice is the foundation of his throne

***Psalm 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.***

4. God is so powerful and sovereign over the kings and princes of the earth that he has no trouble judging any of them at any time... he sees how many of the kings are worthless men and how many of the princes are wicked... and he shows them no partiality at all, but removes them in an instant; they die at night, with no warning
5. So Job's contention that God tolerates the wicked in every case and they often die peacefully in their beds surrounded by loving children (Job 21) may occasionally be true... but the norm is that God is showing great patience to the wicked rulers of the earth, and that at the right time he brings the hammer of justice down heavily on them—as he did for wicked king Ahab and his even more wicked wife, Jezebel—in both cases dogs licked up their blood

E. God's Perfect Knowledge of the Sins of All Men (34:21-28)

***Job 34:21-28 "His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. <sup>22</sup> There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. <sup>23</sup> God has no need to examine men further, that they should come before him for judgment. <sup>24</sup> Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place. <sup>25</sup> Because he takes note of their deeds, he overthrows them in the night and they are crushed. <sup>26</sup> He punishes them for their wickedness where everyone can see them, <sup>27</sup> because they turned from following him and had no regard for any of his ways. <sup>28</sup> They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that he heard the cry of the needy.***

1. God's judgments of human beings is perfect, based on complete knowledge
2. Men in their sins deceive themselves thinking no one can see them, no one will know
3. Elihu reminds us all that there is never a moment in which his omnipresent eye does not see everything we do...

***Psalm 139:11-12 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"<sup>12</sup> even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.***

4. Elihu says he needs no more information about man to judge him... no court trial would be needed, no witnesses called... he already knows what we are in our hearts and what we did with our bodies

***John 2:25 [Jesus] did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man***

5. So, Job's longing for a hearing is not necessary... God already knows who Job is and what he's done

6. Now as these verses continue, it becomes clear that he thinks Job has some dark pattern of hidden sin... despite the fact that Job has openly denied this; Job clearly addressed the patterns of the wicked to wait for dusk to skulk around their neighbor's house to lie with his wife or steal his goods... Job is not that kind of a man!

7. Application: WALKING IN CONSTANT AWARENESS OF THE HOLY GAZE OF GOD!!

a. Sin always comes from unbelief... from lack of faith

b. Faith is the "eyesight of the soul" by which we can see the invisible reality of the holy gaze of God

c. So if we would behave differently when people watch us, we are forgetting that God always sees what we do, and his opinion alone is all that matters

d. Let us not be trapped in our vain imaginations of God, and think he does not see us

e. We should consider the vice that is so deeply rooted in us, especially the concept that God's eyes are shrouded or blindfolded

f. We should also realize that if we are living a double life and appear to men as righteous when we actually are not, we have gained nothing... for no matter how well we may deceive the

watching world, we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of God in the end

- g. At that final Judgment, the books will be read and the record of our lives will be perfect
- h. It seems the Holy Spirit must say this to us again and again, because we don't really seem to believe it
- i. Let us beg God the Spirit to so work in us that we rid ourselves of all hypocrisy and walk clearly in the holy fear of the Lord
- j. Let us lie openly and clearly and freely under the incisive word of the Lord

***Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***

- k. God's Word works in us a clear view of Judgment Day, and causes us to repent and make changes while there's still time
- l. No matter what Elihu's motives or understanding, these words are very helpful for us to repent and walk in holy obedience to God... to rid ourselves of hypocrisy
- m. It is by working in sinners a deep conviction of sin that God saves us... and this deep conviction doesn't stop the moment we become Christians
- n. And it is no good to shoot the messenger... the preacher who tells you the truth about sin and the judgment to come
- o. We should also realize that God is patient with us and gives us time to repent... but we should not presume on that time as though God doesn't care about our sins; often our treacherous hearts feel that God's failure to judge us for our sins means we can do more of them without fear

#### F. God's Freedom to Rule as He Sees Fit (34:29-30)

***Job 34:29-30 But if he remains silent, who can condemn him? If he hides his face, who can see him? Yet he is over man and nation alike, <sup>30</sup> to keep a godless man from ruling, from laying snares for the people.***

1. Here Elihu speaks of the freedom God has sometimes to speak powerfully in judgment, and other times to be silent and give the sinner more time
2. God alone can decide which of these he will do
3. Notice that Elihu speaks of God being over both man and nation alike... God is so omnipresent and powerful that he can bring a judgment on a single man in one afternoon, or on an entire nation in a matter of months of losing a war
4. In this case, Elihu speaks of God's sovereign control over who is ruling each nation on earth

#### III. Elihu Urges Job to Repent

***Job 34:31-37 "Suppose a man says to God, 'I am guilty but will offend no more. <sup>32</sup> Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.' <sup>33</sup> Should God then reward you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know. <sup>34</sup> "Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me, <sup>35</sup> 'Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.' <sup>36</sup> Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost for answering like a wicked man! <sup>37</sup> To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God."***

#### A. Elihu Here Seems to Write Job's Script for Him

1. I openly confess I have sinned and am guilty... but I promise never to do it again
2. I yearn, O Lord, for you to teach me the truth about my sins and your holy judgments so I can turn from sin forever

#### B. The Rest is Difficult to Understand

1. Perhaps he is saying, “Given that God has shown his consistent willingness to forgive any who will confess and repent, it is very serious if you decide to maintain your innocence and refuse to repent”
2. Beyond that, Elihu seems to get very nasty toward Job... again calling him a wicked man who scornfully rejects the wise counsel he is getting from him and his friends

#### IV. Elihu Exalts God as Independent of All Humanity

***Job 35:1-8 Then Elihu said: <sup>2</sup> "Do you think this is just? You say, 'I will be cleared by God.' <sup>3</sup> Yet you ask him, 'What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?' <sup>4</sup> "I would like to reply to you and to your friends with you. <sup>5</sup> Look up at the heavens and see; gaze at the clouds so high above you. <sup>6</sup> If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? <sup>7</sup> If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? <sup>8</sup> Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men.***

##### A. Elihu Now Gives a Sense of the Transcendent God...

1. We spoke of this earlier... that God is in no way benefitted when we obey him or harmed when we rebel against him
2. God is higher above us than the clouds
3. He is lofty, exalted... soaring so far beyond what any man can do

B. So... If Job Says “What Benefit Is It To Me to Avoid Sinning”... then he must know his sins only hurt himself and other people

##### C. Elihu Cries Out Against the Oppression of the Poor by the Powerful

***Job 35:9-13 "Men cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. <sup>10</sup> But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, <sup>11</sup> who teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?' <sup>12</sup> He does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. <sup>13</sup> Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it.***

1. All four men (Job and his three friends) have spoken passionately about concern for social justice... the care for the poor and needy
2. Elihu now adds his voice to theirs
3. Elihu here, however, says that even the poor oppressed are sinners who do not think of God in the midst of their afflictions
4. They suffer, but they wickedly forget God and do not cry out to him
5. When they do, God does not listen, because they do not pray properly—in faith and repentance

#### V. Elihu Again Judges Job

***Job 35:14-16 How much less, then, will he listen when you say that you do not see him, that your case is before him and you must wait for him, <sup>15</sup> and further, that his anger never punishes and he does not take the least notice of wickedness. <sup>16</sup> So Job opens his mouth with empty talk; without knowledge he multiplies words."***

#### VI. Lessons

##### A. We Have Already Seen How We Should Walk in the Fear of the Lord

1. We should immerse ourselves in the word to drive away fantasies of a God who doesn't see or care about our sins

##### B. The Primary Benefit of the Fear of God's Omnipresence and Omniscience is to drive us to the cross of Christ

1. "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved"

##### C. But Our Fears Must Be Relieved by Faith in Christ!!

***Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

Those who are "weary and burdened" are those who yearn for forgiveness

Memory stirs, conscience accuses, terror grows... a burden from which we cannot escape

***Job 13:26-28 For you write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth. 27 You fasten my feet in shackles; you keep close watch on all my paths by putting marks on the soles of my feet. 28 So man wastes away like something rotten, like a garment eaten by moths.***

Puritan Joseph Alleine: "Our sins are as mighty as they are many. The sands are many but they are not mighty. The mountains are mighty, but they are not many. But woe is man, my sins are as many as the sands, and as mighty as the mountains. Their weight is greater than their number."

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: Christian carried on his back a huge burden... only when he came to the cross did it roll off:

"I dreamed and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out in a lamentable cry, saying, 'What shall I do?'"

***Hebrews 10:27 ...a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.***

What a terrible burden to walk under say after day! Not knowing if today you will die in your sins, and be sent to eternity in hell.

There is no greater a burden than anyone can walk under!!

The cross of Christ is the answer and the only answer!!

Christ promises REST and PEACE of forgiveness:

***Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***