

"Who Hides Counsel Without My Knowledge?" (Job 32-41)

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[0 : 00] So Job 31, 35. This is Job speaking, and he says this. Oh, that I had someone to hear me. I sign now my defense. Let the Almighty answer me. Let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder.

I would put it on like a crown. I would give him an account of my every step. Like a prince, I would approach him. If my land cries out against me, and all its furrows are wet with tears, if I have devoured its yield without payment or broken the spirit of its tenants, then let briars come up instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley.

The words of Job are ended. Chapter 32. So these three men stopped answering Job because he was righteous in his own eyes.

But Elihu, son of Barachel, the Buzite of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was also angry with the three friends because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him.

[1 : 15] Now, Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he, but when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.

Let's pray. Father, this is a very unknown part of Scripture for many of us, so please, as we've been exploring and going deeper into pain and suffering through this book, would you start to give us answers?

Answers on how our view of God should be challenged. Answers to whether, God, you are just. Whether you are wise. Help us now.

Even if we cannot fully comprehend it all, help us now to listen to your word and to be transformed by it. In your son's precious name we pray. Amen. At some point, all of us who experience pain and suffering will probably ask one of two questions.

Why did this happen? And how is this fair? I wonder if you reflect on your own trials, if you've ever asked these questions before.

[2 : 27] Why did this happen? And how is this fair? And perhaps you don't believe in God. And if that's the case, maybe you've come up or borrowed certain answers. Maybe you've heard a phrase like, stuff happens.

Or, it is what it is. They don't always satisfy, though, for some people. I'll give you an example. For example, in 2013, when two bombs exploded at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, there was a journalist, Eleanor Barkhorn, and she recounted how her social media feeds just lit up with calls to pray for Boston.

I wonder if you've reflected and noticed that same trend anytime there's a disaster. In the midst of crisis, she was reflecting for a brief moment.

It wasn't just her religious friends that were sharing this. It was also non-religious friends, too.

Reaching and searching for some kind of answer. And as Christians, we, too, search for answers when we go through pain and suffering.

Answers to questions like, why did this happen? How is it fair? And yet, as Christians, because we direct these questions at God, these become really personal questions, don't they?

[3 : 45] God, why did this happen? How is this fair, God? We ask questions searching for answers. And so, actually, chapter 32 of the book of Job is so important.

It is a crucial turning point in the story. I mean, some of you, when I heard that, maybe you were thinking, Elihu? We'll get to that. The key thing to notice, though, actually, in that passage I read is that we start to get answers.

Okay? Notice what the narrator repeats, right? These three men, they stopped answering Job. Elihu gets angry, right? Because they had found no way, actually, literally, the word says, no answer to Job.

And then finally, when he saw that the three men had no answers to Job, his anger was aroused. You see, from this chapter onwards, we start to get some answers to Job's questions.

Remember who Job is? Okay? Some of you who have been journeying from the start would know that he's a man of integrity, blameless, as it says in chapter 1, verse 1. Yet he lost almost everything that was dear to him.

[4 : 54] Job has howled in grief. He has had three of his buddies offered some lousy answers as we heard last week. And for those of you who took up the challenge in reading those 27 chapters, Job, I wonder if you noticed, he became more and more agitated.

He became more and more bold in proclaiming as innocent to the point that when we get to chapter 31, right, he says, oh, if I had someone to hear me, I sign now my defence.

Let the Almighty answer me. Job is trying to get God in the dock and have his day in court with him.

You see, because Job's charge is that God has been unfair, that his suffering has been unjust.

He wants God to be weighed up on scales. He wants to show him his integrity. He wants a final answer. Either the Almighty shows up and answers with what he's guilty of or if he doesn't, Job's like, I win by default.

And so actually what we see in these final ten chapters of poetry in the book of Job, there are actually two sets of answers we get. We get one set of answers from Elihu and the other set of answers from God himself.

[6 : 16] Right? So Elihu, he speaks with six chapters from chapter 32 to 37 and then the Lord himself answers from 38 to 41.

Right? So ten chapters but two speakers. And while God's reply is maybe the more famous, we've heard some words even where we're saying indescribable straight from Job 38 from God's words.

I think it's actually worth hearing from both Elihu and God because both of them are doing this thing we're looking for, answering Job. And again, I want to encourage you. It's a great thing if you can read these chapters in your own time.

Right? That's what uni holidays are for, right? Deep reading. I mean, look, deeper than these ten chapters of some of the best poetry in the world is wisdom for our pain and suffering.

So I hope you dive in and maybe find some answers. So today, we're just going to look at these two answers. Okay? We're going to look first at Elihu's answer and then God's answer. So that's all we'll do today.

[7 : 19] All right, let's look first at Elihu's answer to Job. Some of you may know that Elihu actually gets quite a bad rap in some circles. Okay? Because we actually haven't heard about him until now.

So some people actually think he's just a made-up character. Maybe he just got inserted, laid in the piece. He wasn't mentioned at the start or the finish. Other people say maybe he's a comic relief kind of character.

Maybe he's like Olaf in Frozen, right, the snowman. Or maybe he's like Loki just gets bounced around in the first Avengers and that's it. Elihu, though, is introduced respectfully here in Job 32, isn't he?

Right? What did we hear? We heard him introduced even with a family tree. Okay? That shows that he is a someone of standing, of respect. Son of Barakal to Buzait. Perhaps, actually, that links him to Abraham's family back in Genesis 22.

You can have a look for yourself. And in a story, just because someone only appears once, I don't think that makes him unimportant. Okay? Sometimes, I don't know, I don't know the dramas you watch, maybe there's a character that makes one appearance and it just changes the whole story around.

[8 : 28] Profoundly important. You think of Luke Skywalker, right, in Force Awakens. Like, two seconds in the movie, but huge shift. So Elihu, I think, has an important role to play.

Look, the other question, though, is this. How do we deal with what Elihu says? Because he says a lot of stuff, but is it more of the sophisticated rubbish that we heard from Job's friends last week?

Or is he actually speaking for God himself? Kind of like a prophet. Or is it something else? This is where, if you only skim through the book of Job, okay, and just go, I'll just use the headings to make my way around, I think you'll lose out.

Because on the surface, it is very easy just to assume that Elihu is just kind of playing reruns of what Job's friends have been saying. Look, Elihu's waited a long while, right, 27 chapters, to hear what the older and wiser Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had to say.

But here, in Job 32, in verse 14, we read, Elihu finally tells them, I will not answer him with your speeches. Okay?

[9 : 33] Job hasn't marshaled his words against me. I'm not going to answer him with your arguments. So take a listen. We've got to pay attention. He's giving a different answer. And let me try and break down what he says.

And I think you'll find actually most of what Elihu says in chapter 33. So I'm reading chapter 33. So feel free to follow along in your Bibles as well. Chapter 33 says this, But now, Job, listen to my words.

Pay attention to everything I say. I'm about to open my mouth. My words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart. My lips sincerely speak what I know.

The Spirit of God has made me. The breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me then, if you can. Prepare yourself and confront me. I'm just like you before God.

I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy on you. You see, Elihu speaks to Job as a peer, right?

[10 : 30] They're both pinched from the same clay, made from the same dirt, as it were. He comes not as kind of a patronizing wise guy. He comes alongside as a sympathetic peer.

That's a good place to start, right? If you want to counsel a friend well, if you want to get to your son or your daughter's heart, come alongside them, side by side. And then Elihu goes on, verse 8.

But you have said in my hearing, I heard the very words, I am pure and without sin. I am clean and free from guilt, yet God has found fault with me. He considers me his enemy.

He fastens my feet and shackles. He keeps close watch on all my paths. So there's something very specific that's going on here. Unlike the other wise guys who actually ended up even making up sins that Job must have done, Elihu has listened carefully through chapters 4 to 31, so much so that he's actually able to summarize Job's argument accurately.

You see, there's actually quotation marks in some of your Bibles. And I wonder if we displayed what Elihu says on the left, you see, with what Job himself has said. This is chapter 13 of Job I put up.

[11 : 40] You can see how similar Elihu has actually reflected what Job said accurately. Right? Verse 9. I am pure, I have done no wrong, I am clean and free from sin. That's exactly what Job himself has claimed over and over again, especially in chapter 13.

And then Elihu again quotes Job, right? Verse 10. Yet God has found fault with me. He considers me his enemy. And yes, actually, if you look carefully, Job has said something very similar.

He says this, verse 24 of chapter 13. Why do you hide your face? Why do you consider me your enemy? And then, actually, verse 11, here in chapter 33, is actually a word-for-word quote from Job himself.

Right? I wonder if he can see it. He fasts my feet and shackles. He keeps close watch on all my paths. You see, where Job's friends from last week, they kind of twisted his position.

Elihu quotes what Job actually says. That's a wise thing to do if you want to help your friend out. Let me give you a not wise thing that I did. Once, a friend of mine, he was sharing how hard his family was struggling.

[12 : 49] They were under a lot of financial pressure. Work was hard. His employer wasn't supportive. Our family was living in Sydney at the time and I decided that with a free day, I would write a long letter to him.

I mean, you see, I was a brainy Bible college student, you see, and surely I could see all the idols that he was struggling with and all the sins that he needed to repent of. So there I was, riding away. And yet it was only later that I learned how hurtful my advice actually came across. My friend didn't need a sermon about how to store up his treasures in heaven.

Worst of all though, I actually hadn't understood his situation correctly. It was only after a conversation I realised, oh, man, that is why you're going through what you're going through. So I had actually pretty much done an Aliphaz and I had to apologise and ask for forgiveness.

So learn from my mistake. Don't learn from my mistakes. Learn from Elihu instead. He's so much wiser. Listen carefully and summarise your friend's heart correctly.

[13:59] Only then, you notice, does he respond. This is counselling 101, isn't it? Active listening, accurate mirroring of your friend. I mean, long before modern counsellors invented it, here is Elihu. Practising it. So good. But I think as we heard, here Elihu kind of reflect Job's kind of state of mind, I think we start to wonder about Job himself, don't we?

I mean, most of us, if you've grown up in church or you're familiar with the Job story, the Sunday school version at least, we think of Job as the one who worships, right? The inn. Right?

But no, we've actually seen there's more to Job. He's a complex character. Seen him lament, right, in chapter 3. And I wonder though, if you have thought of Job who protests, who gets angry at God, who even starts to say wrong things against him, right?

accuses God of mocking his despair or tearing him up in anger or treating him unjustly. But friends, this is Job too. I mean, Job is like us, right?

[15:09] Warts and all. Mixed in with all our righteous thoughts, there have also been wrong thoughts in our lives. And I think Job has been the same. And so actually, the rest of Elihu's response in his six chapters of talk is to rightly rebuke Job for those bits, right?

Let me read verse 12 of chapter 33. Elihu says this, but I tell you, in this, you are not right. For God is greater than any mortal.

Now one author puts it like this. Okay, so Job's friends said that Job was suffering because he had sinned. Elihu's saying that Job has sinned because he was suffering.

You see the difference? You see the difference? And yes, look, as you read Elihu's argument, he comes across as a little bit awkward and angry. Like maybe he's never talked to someone before. But his anger is not self-centered, okay? He's not trying to justify himself. Actually, he really tries to defend God's character and his justice. I don't know, perhaps like John the Baptist, a little bit awkward as a person, but speaking God's truth, defending Jesus' character.

[16:19] Maybe that's what Elihu's like. He's defending God's reputation because Job has started to accuse him of being unfair, unjust. That's a line that he's crossed and Elihu's kind of reign him in.

In his anger, I don't think he sins. Right? Because Job has accused God of being unfair, Elihu answers with kind of righteous anger. Job, how could you? How can you question God's justice? Can you really question his mercy, his kindness, his awesome presence? And look, Elihu doesn't try to answer all of Job's issues. And we can't try and answer all of our friends' issues when we get to this stage.

But he does point out a wrong conclusion that many of us make with suffering. Okay? And it's this, if I can't see any fairness to suffering, then God is unfair. Okay?

That's a wrong conclusion to make. And Elihu actually even suggests a few verses later in his chapter 33, again, he starts to say maybe one reason for suffering is that it turns us from wrongdoing or keeps us from pride or preserves us from the pit.

[17:24] You see, he's starting to try and think of some reasons that Job could possibly be suffering. And actually, millions of God's people who have endured pain and suffering would agree with this kind of thinking.

I mean, think of Psalm 119, 67. The psalmist says, before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. Or, the apostle Paul saying this, the words of Jesus, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Now, remember where we are in Job's story. Okay? People have sat with Job for a long time. Job has had a long time to talk things through. So, we mustn't come in at the wrong time with this kind of wisdom or advice.

But I think Elihu's wisdom to Job and to us is this, can you actually question God's justice? Do you know for sure there is absolutely no point to your suffering?

Maybe there is. Maybe you actually haven't seen it yet. And so, after Elihu answers, and that's really his argument, he tries to defend God's justice, right?

[18:33] And so, Elihu does that. That's how he answers Job. After he does this, we get God's answer to Job from chapters 38 to 41. And I don't know, to chat one-on-one with your boss or your principal, that might be a little bit scary for some of you, but imagine the Lord speaking directly to Job.

That must be terrifying. And actually, this is God's word, unfiltered. I don't know. I think we need to pay attention here. This is four chapters of the most sublime poetry.

And this is God's direct answer to Job's worship, his weeping, his finger pointing. It all comes up to this. And all through this, Job has been challenging Job.

Job has been challenging God with this question. Why is this happening? And now, God is going to answer him back with a deeper question. Job, can you understand my wisdom?

Have a listen. Chapter 38 says this. Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said, Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?

[19 : 48] Brace yourself like a man. I will question you and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. Who stretched the measuring line across it? On what were its footings set? Or who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb? When I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness? When I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place?

When I said, This far you may come and no further. Here is where your proud waves halt. Have you ever given orders to the morning? Or shown the dawn its place?

That it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it? The earth takes shape like clay under a seal. Its features stand out like those of a garment. The wicked are denied their light and their upraised arm is broken.

[20 : 50] Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?

Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me if you know all this. Elihu answered Job with anger and God answers Job with wisdom.

With wisdom from creation. Elihu said, Job, can you question God's justice? And yet here God answers Job with a question, can you understand my wisdom in creation?

And remember, God is giving answers to Job. And so actually what we need to do then is to trace back to Job's earlier questions. And where did he ask a lot of questions?

It was actually in chapter 3. Do you remember that? When he lamented. And actually there's a lot of parallels between chapter 3 and chapter 38, you see, where Job saw only darkness and his sufferings, chapter 3.

[21 : 54] He was just painting with black. God now challenges him to see not just darkness, but light as well in his world. He challenges Job, did you split light from darkness at creation?

Where Job earlier spoke like someone who kind of seemed to know how the world ran, God has to challenge him. Do you now? Were you there when I laid the earth's foundations? When all the angels or sons of gods shouted for joy, were you there to trace the sun's path, Job?

Did you put out every star and place, even Matariki? Surely you were there, Job. Surely you've lived so many years. That's what Job actually says in verse 22. A bit of sarcasm there.

And these are rhetorical questions, of course, aren't they? Okay. The only right answer for Job to make is to say, no, I didn't. You did, God.

No, not me, you. And actually that's exactly what Job does. Let me read chapter 40, verse 4 to 5. Job answered the Lord, I'm unworthy.

[22 : 59] How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer. Twice, but I will say no more. I mean, what kind of answer is that?

Some of us might be wondering. I mean, God never actually answers some of his deepest questions, right? God doesn't tell Job, oh, by the way, I was duking it out with Satan in heaven. Sorry, Job.

He doesn't even say any of that. And yet, his answers here are more deep and merciful and wise than anything Job could have asked for.

And if you're wondering, how is a safari tour of the universe a good answer to Job's cries of why? I think it comes down to this. When we look at creation with eyes of faith, we are reminded that God is God and we are not.

I'll say it again. God is God and we are not. And in his wisdom, in his world, he has ordained not just order like streets in a city, but there is also chaos and complexity like lions that eat their young, like hurricanes that swirl.

[24 : 17] In his world, there is chaos and complexity. There are viral mutations. There are vein patterns on leaves. In God's world, there are fractal snowflakes.

And there are flocks in formation. This is what God's world looks like. There's order, and yet there's disorder. There's beauty, yet there's brokenness too.

It is a wild world, and most of it unseen, and all in God's hands. And the right response with eyes of faith is wow, and bow down to God.

And God's wisdom creation is awesome. I think one of the dangers of suffering is that like Joe, we might start to ask the wrong questions, or we might start to look for answers in the wrong places. And our father says, open your eyes to my world. The heavens declare my glory. The skies declare my craftsmanship. There is light and dark in my world.

[25 : 27] Order and disorder, I have a place for both, and learn from it, my child. I don't know, we might not even appreciate this ourselves if we never go out into creation.

And so I think there actually is wisdom in a very basic thing to unplug from our devices. And from all our Job's friends on our phones who paint the world in black and white, this or that, mute, delete, go for a walk, take your dog out, plunge yourself into the colour and chaos of God's creation, do it. And I mean, don't do the Asian tourist thing, just leave your phone behind, actually go into God's will. Listen to creation shout God's praise.

Put your pain and suffering into the perspective of this is God's will, not mine. And in his world, creation is wild, not always explainable, but awesome.

And if you're helping a friend go through suffering, there is sometimes wisdom, right, in saying to someone who's struggling, let's go for a walk, let's go watch the waves on eastern beach, right, let's go feel small under the night sky, maybe go out for a long drive so you can watch horses gallop, ducklings swim in formation, right, or earthworms wriggling on the pavement after a rainstorm, whatever it is, go and see God's will.

[26 : 55] Because in our suffering, God declares that in his wisdom, creation is awesome. Can you see this? And I know there's this big question that sometimes, we still have struggles with, right, the problem of evil.

Why does a good God allow evil and suffering in this world? I wonder if this safari tour of the universe, God is within this saying to Job, yes, there is a place for evil and chaos in my world. I have permitted it, ordained it, allowed it, yet I have set strict limits for it. You see that? Right through these chapters, God mentions some of his control over creation.

Like a wriggly baby is wrapped in cloth, that's how God controls the world. Like a cliff face breaks pounding waves, that's how God rules. You see there is disorder, but it goes no further than where God lets it.

But then God really digs deep into this question, I think, in the last two chapters of his speech, chapter 40 and chapter 41. And there he describes two creatures, they're called Behemoth and Leviathan.

[28 : 09] And then, I think at this point, some of you might be puzzled. Why are there Pokemon in the Bible? But Job is not, you know, playing Pokemon or he's not on drugs or he's not on some kind of trip.

There are all kinds of theories around what God exactly is talking about here, right? Some think that these are dinosaurs or zoo animals. I think the clincher I think is in chapter 41 verse 18 to 21 which describes kind of like a fire breathing dragon.

And I haven't met a fire breathing crocodile at the zoo yet. So I think, just as we see sometimes in the Bible, symbolism, imagery, okay?

We think of the red dragon in the book of Revelation representing Satan. We think of four beasts in Daniel's visions representing evil kingdoms. I think here, God is describing death and evil, even Satan himself, using mythical language of Job's first readers, right?

3,000 years ago. And so, in a sense, he's trying to explain good and bad, light and dark, using Pokemon. But again, the key thing to note is that Behemoth and Leviathan, they may seem wild and scary, but they are fully under God's control.

[29 : 30] Okay? Job 40, 19, all right? It says this, he ranks first among the works of God, behemoth, yet his maker can approach him with his sword, you see? Or verse 41, sorry, chapter 41, verse 1, can you pull in the Leviathan with a fish hook or tie down his tongue with a rope?

You see? Likewise, pain and suffering, death and evil can be wild and scary at times, but God is trying to tell us that he has got it all on a leash.

The Bible teaches this, in God's wisdom and justice, evil is allowed for a time. Disorder has its place in God's order, and yet it is not like God versus Satan, and you won't know who will win in the end. It is God over Satan, and one day, when our king returns, the deceiver will be completely crushed. This is the worldview that sits under what Job needs to hear to be transformed.

And again, there's a time and place to wrestle all this. Maybe to you right now, you're in the midst of suffering. This sounds a little bit cold and incomplete. It can do. But eventually, for everyone who suffers, one of God's answers to a world filled with pain and suffering is essentially this, his poetry, his majesty.

[30 : 59] He says, I am who I am, king of creation, lord of land and sea, a world not neat and orderly, but wild and free, by my decree, now worship me.

And we'll see next week how Job answers this. And yet, for now, we must remember that this truth brings comfort amidst pain and suffering.

And I think more comfort than not believing that God is in control. You see, because Elihu's answer and God's answer, they both sit actually at the heart of the Christian faith, do they not?

Think about it. When someone cries, I can't see any point to my suffering, how is it fair? We say, yes. sometimes suffering seems unfair.

And do you know what? In the gospel, wasn't there deep unfairness? That God and Christ would suffer for sins he did not commit?

[32 : 03] Wasn't that unfair? God knows how it feels. And what is unfair now will one day be fair again in the new heavens and earth when the king returns.

And when someone cries out, how could God allow this evil? Why did this happen? We say to our friend, yes. Yes.

Creation, it's wild and free, scarred with pain. And while God cannot be blamed for evil, he sits over it with perfect wisdom because look at the cross.

Look at the cross. There, God sat over the most evil deed in human history. Did he not? there was the biggest flex of Satan's monstrous power and yet it brought about the greatest good to our world. Why did this happen? And how is this fair? This is God's wise and just answer to suffering. He suffered himself. So how will we answer him?

[33 : 10] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, we bring our questions to you and when you answer us, teach us to not answer back, but to listen, to know that you are God and we are not, to know that you have a place for suffering in this broken world, and that you loved us so much that you suffered yourself in Christ.

help us now. Amen.