

December 6, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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THE MAN WHO WOULD TEACH WISDOM Job 32-33

Frank Abagnale Jr. was one of the most skillful imposters of all time. He grew up in New Rochelle, N.Y. but ran away as a teen in the midst of his parents' divorce. He first got into trouble when he had to transfer to a public school where, on the first day, he impersonated a substitute French teacher. One fraud led to another including pretending to be a doctor and even an airline pilot. Eventually, he got into forgery simply as a means to survive. That plot grew until he had forged millions of dollars in checks. Eventually, he was caught. But the irony of the whole story is that he served much of his twelve-year prison sentence working for the F.B.I. to identify forgers and counterfeiters.

There have been religious frauds, charlatans, and impersonators as far back as human history records. God, the only author of the only truth, has warned His people from the beginning that Satan, the arch fraud and enemy of God, will continue to authorize pretenders to twist God's truth until the end of the age.

Teaching that veers from the revealed truth of God ought to be easy to spot. All we need to do is compare the supposed truth to the truth God has given in the Bible. That is what an identifier of counterfeit money does. A good agent will be so familiar with the genuine that he or she can spot bogus bills in a moment.

However, what if a lot of what a teacher, preacher, counselor, or friend says is true? What if someone speaks the word of God, in limited fashion, but then presents their personal experience as the standard of truth? This is a real problem in the broader landscape of Christianity today. Too many preachers stand before too many listening, hurting people who want help and claim to be telling them

what God says. But if you listen even a little closely, you discover that they spend five minutes telling you what God said and then thirty minutes telling you what they have learned from life's experiences. Without knowing what has happened, the listener has established the speaker's experience as the standard of truth. Then when his or her life doesn't take the same twists and turns the fellow human said he experienced, it appears to the listener that truth has failed.

Elihu was one of those kind of counselors. It appeared that he had waited patiently, respecting all the old guys while they waxed eloquently about what God did or did not do. When it became obvious that they were not able to convince Job of his sin, Elihu the youngster spoke up claiming to speak with God's wisdom. But in reality, Elihu did not offer any better arguments than had already been submitted.

We must be careful as listeners to determine if the teacher, preacher, counselor is explaining the truth God gave us or presenting their life experience as the standard for living. We must be careful as speakers, helpers, encouragers to clearly identify the difference between our opinions, the opinions of popular writers, and the truth that God has already established in the Bible.

I Am Humble but I Must Speak (32:1-22).

Silence does not always imply righteousness (32:1-5). Elihu certainly proves that to us in this part of the Job story. He illustrated how a counselor might appear to listen patiently, when that is not actually the case. According to God's record of the event, Elihu did wait until the other men finished speaking, having failed to convince Job of his supposed sin. *So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes (v.1).*

We are not sure how long that was, but it seems like it was quite awhile. The story also reveals that part of the reason Elihu waited patiently was to show respect for the older men. *Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were older than he (v.4).* But a person's silence does not necessarily indicate their righteous attitude. When they finally do speak, they can be as vitriolic as was Elihu. In this case, the apparently patient counselor was consumed with anger.

The text makes it quite clear that Elihu was very angry at Job. *Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God (v.2).* He was burning in his soul, like a raging fire. A very similar Hebrew word speaks of God's consuming wrath. Elihu was burning with anger, a word that is often used to describe God's settled indignation against the sinner and his sin. This level of anger is described by a Hebrew word that pictures the flaring of nostrils.

Job's insistence that he was not guilty of sin, that he was righteous before God was the source of Elihu's raging indignation. But as often is the case when someone is angry, the anger affects others also. Elihu was very angry at the other counselors. He was furious because even though the other counselors confronted Job's supposed sin, they were unable to convince the sinner of his error. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong (v.3). He was angry because no one had an answer to explain Job's stubborn insistence that he was innocent. *And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, he burned with anger (v.5).*

This man was so sure that his conclusions and opinions were correct that anyone who did not meet his standard became the recipient of his fury. Right at the outset of the description of this counselor, we should conclude that he was not righteous. A righteous person will be angry at how sinners treat God, but not because sinners don't agree with them.

Furthermore, the text teaches us that silence does not always imply humility (32:6-22). The counselor might appear to be timid or, as it was in this case of Elihu, the person might give the appearance of humility. The supposedly timid man left no doubt that he waited and listened to others first. *Behold, I waited for your words, I listened for your wise sayings, while you searched out what to say. I gave you my attention, and, behold, there was none among you who refuted Job or who answered his words (v.11-12).*

Elihu made a big deal about waiting patiently while listening to his peers' futile attempts to correct Job, and Job's futile attempts to prove his justification. In reality, Elihu was laying the foundation for

why Job and the three counselors should listen to his conclusions. Essentially he said, "I waited and listened to your words of wisdom to no avail. . . now you listen to me."

In answer to the problem he presented, Elihu posed a shocking question: "Should I wait and leave it up to God to change a man?" That is what verse thirteen means. *Beware lest you say, "We have found wisdom; God may vanquish him, not a man" (v.13).* Elihu presented himself as the attorney to defend God. He was angry because, in his opinion, the other attorneys failed to prove that God was right for punishing Job. Therefore, Elihu, having accused them of failure, chose to answer for them regarding the accusation that none of them refuted Job. Anticipating their reply, he proposed "You spoke with wisdom and you are just going to leave the case hanging?"

Then came a very telling statement: *God may vanquish him, not a man (v.13).* Counselor number four accused his peers of walking away and leaving it to God to change Job. In reality, that is often the best response when we have tried to convince a person of sin with no success. In fact, that is what church discipline does. Per God's instruction, church discipline turns an unrepentant sinner out of the sphere of God's protection into the sphere of Satan. Paul gave the instruction like this: *When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).* The implication is that this was going to develop into a painful experience. God can use the resulting trouble of such discipline or He can use His quiet, heart-changing grace to correct what human wisdom cannot change.

Ultimately, Elihu argued, "I have better arguments." *He has not directed his words against me, and I will not answer him with your speeches (v.14).* That statement begins to shed a little light on the man's actual attitude. He was not a timid, quiet man who yielded to maturity. He was actually quite arrogant and made a pretty boastful claim. *But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand (v.8).*

In this statement, Elihu actually claimed to be inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Of course God did send the Holy Spirit on chosen

servants at special times in the Old Testament dispensation. But this is obviously not one of those times. And because he thought he was divinely inspired, able to speak for God, his arguments were supposedly superior to the wisdom of the aged. *It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say, "Listen to me; let me also declare my opinion" (vv.9-10).*

That was just plain arrogance. That is why the counselor felt a strong compulsion to speak. True timidity does not feel like it **has** to speak. Therefore, we should conclude that Elihu was not really timid. Rather, having waited, now he just had to speak his mind. Will he continue to wait for more arguments, a better representing of the case? *They are dismayed; they answer no more; they have not a word to say. And shall I wait, because they do not speak, because they stand there, and answer no more (vv.15-16)?* No. He was done waiting. Now he must speak. *I also will answer with my share; I also will declare my opinion. For I am full of words; the spirit within me constrains me. Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer. I will not show partiality to any man or use flattery toward any person. For I do not know how to flatter, else my Maker would soon take me away (vv.17-22).*

My Mouth Speaks Wisdom (33:1-33).

The counselor was sure he spoke God's wisdom. That is not necessarily a bad thing. It is good when someone speaks for God – if they actually speak for God. Elihu's challenge for Job to listen seems to indicate that he was convinced he spoke of God. *But now, hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. Behold, I open my mouth; the tongue in my mouth speaks (vv.1-2).* This is simply an expression of great confidence. If you think you are right, you expect others to listen. But this is often a sign of arrogance, not wisdom. It is difficult to enjoy a relationship with someone who is convinced he or she is always right and willing to argue to that end.

Elihu offered a good reason why Job should listen. *My words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know they speak sincerely (v.3).* This is not a good example for us to follow. Notice the pharisaical hypocrisy. Elihu flatly implied that Job was

dead wrong, living in sin, which was obvious because of his trials. In contrast, Elihu was upright in his heart, knowing that he could only speak truth. The irony is that (and we have the privilege of knowing the whole story), Job is the only one of the bunch who we know was upright according to the testimony of God Himself.

The counselor also offered an appeal to authority. *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (v.4).* But hasn't God made everyone? Did God also put His breath in Job? Elihu admitted as much in v.6. And he offered a challenge for Job to answer. *Answer me, if you can; set your words in order before me; take your stand (v.5).* Job need not fear to answer. Elihu assured him that they were equals. *Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. Behold, no fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy upon you (vv.6-7).* This was an appeal to listen based on Elihu's humble assessment that he could identify with, sympathize with Job's suffering. And yet, already Elihu has made it clear that he has superior knowledge and wisdom, yeah, he speaks for God.

Okay, there are times when someone will try to help us claiming to speak of God when they don't. But, in the long run, we ought to listen to God's wisdom. The counselor was pretty emphatic about the sufferer's need to listen. *Pay attention, O Job, listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. If you have any words, answer me; speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom (vv.31-33).* It is true that God does give humans the responsibility to speak His wisdom. God does give insight and understanding of His words. But, not everyone who claims to speak for God does so.

Much of what the counselor Elihu spoke is true, even if it is true only on a human-to-human level. Elihu assessed Job's response according to human wisdom. He drew conclusions with limited wisdom. He admitted that he heard Job's arguments. *Surely you have spoken in my ears, and I have heard the sound of your words. You say, "I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me. Behold, he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy, he puts my feet in the stocks and watches all my paths" (vv.8-11).*

And like the other friends, this friend concluded that Job was wrong. *Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, "He will answer none of man's words" (vv.12-13)?* When we presume to answer for God, we can easily encroach on an area that is not for us. In contrast to Elihu who desires to speak for God, we should exercise care not to assume we know the secret things. God has warned us, *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29).*

God gave us His law and promises. These are things revealed for which we are responsible. We are responsible to know and practice the truths found in the Bible. In that, we have plenty enough knowledge clearly revealed for which we are responsible. We don't need to go poking around in the dark corners to try to discover a deep secret about God that no one else knows. There are things God keeps secret which we must respect. He keeps certain things secret to remind us that He is our Creator, our superior. Most of the time, discovery of a secret thing is simply pride. As if to say, "I can know what you can't know."

One important area where Elihu hit on the truth is that God does speak in many ways throughout history. Elihu seemed to understand this truth to a point. However, when God does speak, people don't always hear Him. *For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it (v.14).*

How has God spoken? Before God gave the Bible He would speak in dreams and visions. *In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword (vv.15-18).*

God also speaks through trials. *Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones, so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food. His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. His soul draws near the pit, and his life to those who bring death (vv.19-22).*

Wouldn't it be great if we had a mediator, and arbiter through whom God would speak to us? That is what both Job and Elihu hoped for. *If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, and he is merciful to him, and says, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom; let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor" (vv.23-25).*

If there was an arbiter who could help us, we could pray and God could speak in the terms of forgiveness, restoration, and redemption. Forgiveness is the idea behind the statement that *man prays to God, and he accepts him (v.26a)*. In such a case, the penitent sees God and God restores him to righteousness. *He sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness (v.26b)*. The result is that the penitent sings with thanksgiving. *He sings before men and says: "I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me" (v.27).*

Because of the arbiter's work, the penitent can sing of redemption. *He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light (v.28)*. This is all God's work. *Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life (vv.29-30).*

Yes, wouldn't it be great if God would speak directly to us and provide a mediator to speak for us to Him? There is good and important truth on that matter. God has spoken. The writer to the Hebrew Christians reminds us that, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets (Hebrews 1:1)*. All of that "speaking" is recorded in the Old Testament.

But God also speaks through His creation. *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:19-20).*

God didn't stop there. He also continues to speak through His law that He has written on our consciences. *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show*

that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Romans 2:14-15).

All of these truths are verified and clearly affirmed because God has spoken vividly through His written word. *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).*

But most importantly God speaks through Jesus Christ. *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:2-3).*

The incredible news is that there was hope for Job, and there is hope for you and me. God speaks to us through the one and only Arbiter Jesus Christ. The Son of God takes our case, defends us by pleading His blood as the redemption price to buy us out of sin. We are now privileged to approach God and talk to Him about our trials. And He talks to us most clearly through the word He has given to us. We test the words, the ideas, the thoughts of all spirits, all people by measuring them against the Word of Truth God has given.

Knowing what God has already said, knowing the promises God has already given, serves as our rock, our fortress in the time of trials and doubts. Even when we are wrong and have sinned, we can have greatest confidence in what God has already said. His rebuke that is focused specifically on our failure and lack of faith should be a source of assurance for us. But even better, His words of comfort and promised presence should be a greater comfort than even the words of our closest friend.