

September 7, 2008
Pentecost 17

"Job, Your God Is Too Small!"

JOB 33

But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. ² I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. ³ My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know. ⁴ The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. ⁵ Answer me then, if you can; prepare yourself and confront me. ⁶ I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. ⁷ No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you. ⁸ "But you have said in my hearing-- I heard the very words--
⁹ 'I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. ¹⁰ Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. ¹¹ He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.' ¹² "But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than man. ¹³ Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words? ¹⁴ For God does speak-- now one way, now another-- though man may not perceive it. ¹⁵ In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, ¹⁶ he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, ¹⁷ to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, ¹⁸ to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. ¹⁹ Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, ²⁰ so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal. ²¹ His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. ²² His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death. ²³ "Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, ²⁴ to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him'-- ²⁵ then his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth. ²⁶ He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state. ²⁷ Then he comes to men and says, 'I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. ²⁸ He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.' ²⁹ "God does all these things to a man-- twice, even three times-- ³⁰ to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him. ³¹ "Pay attention, Job, and listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. ³² If you have anything to say, answer me; speak up, for I want you to be cleared. ³³ But if not, then listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom."

If I take this balloon in my hand and keep blowing it up and blowing it up, eventually it will burst. That's how this young man Elihu describes his eagerness to help Job with his problem of pain and suffering. He describes himself, not like a balloon, but like a goatskin full of new wine that is fermenting inside and ready to burst open. Elihu has had it with Job's three friends who mercilessly beat up on him by telling him that he was suffering because of the terrible sins he committed. Elihu also lost patience with Job when he heard him say sinful things about the Lord. Job did not suffer for sinning, but he did sin his suffering.

Elihu had some good words to share with Job, but in his eagerness to set things straight he

overstates the case and goes too far in what he says. He lacked good bedside manners so important in visiting the sick and suffering. He speaks the truth but fails to speak the truth gently and carefully. Have you ever been so eager to correct someone that you overstated the case and in the process you caused them more pain and suffering rather than bringing them comfort and peace?

Job needs someone to speak to him. He is suffering from having a small and limited view of God. He sees God as someone who is out to get him, someone who doesn't care all that much about him, someone who doesn't even bother to hear his prayers and someone who made a huge mistake by taking away blessings from him. To the rescue comes our young man Elihu, eager help Job by telling him bluntly, "Job, your God is too small."

Job you don't see God's righteousness

Elihu is so eager to show Job that God is a righteous and perfect, and knows exactly what he is doing. He cries out to poor Job, "Listen to my words!" Repeatedly he uses a Hebrew word that means, "Behold" just as we might use the word "See" or "Look" over and over again to get someone's attention. His enthusiasm was too intense for poor suffering Job. But to his credit he does show humility and restraint as he reminds Job in verse 6, "I am a man just as you before God; for I too have been taken from clay." He says, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the almighty gives me life." We are reminded of the words from Paul who said, "I am what I am by the grace of God."

Elihu gets carried away even more as he falsely accuses Job, "But you have said in my hearing- I have heard the very words- I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt." Job talked about being blameless in the eyes of the community and innocent of some awful sin or crime, but Job never made the claim for himself that he was without sin. Elihu simply goes too far in falsely accusing Job for claiming he was blameless and without sin. On the plus side Elihu is not afraid to correct Job for falsely accusing God by saying, "God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles."

Have you ever needed someone to correct you for questioning the Lord? Maybe you have had moments when you said or thought, "What did I ever do wrong to deserve this?" I have heard people say, "I am ready for the other shoe to drop" as if God is out to get them. Or maybe you have heard someone talk about having a bad streak of luck. Lurking in the back of our minds is always the thought that I don't deserve these problems and afflictions because I have been trying to do my best to serve the Lord.

Job, you need help. Your view of God is too small. Elihu had the right words when he said, "But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than man." During times of difficulty and trouble we tend to have a small view of God. We may think that God does not hear our prayers, or that he does not care about us, or that he can never work out everything for his glory and our God. Oh, we sing hymns such as "How great thou art" and "What God ordains is always good" but when the pain and suffering don't go away, suddenly God seems distant and far away not there for us.

The other day my wife was talking to her father and telling him about the tomatoes and the cucumbers and the beans we have in the garden. He asked her what she does when

she looks at the basket of tomatoes ripening on the kitchen counter. Off course he was encouraging her to thank the Lord for the blessing of the tomatoes. Psalm 118 begins with words, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever." How good has the Lord been in your life? How big are his mercies for you that never change even though big changes come into your life?

The Lord our God is great. He is an awesome God. He is holy and righteous in everything he does. We are born into this world with a very small view of God that leads us to believe we can get rewards from God in this life and for all eternity by doing well on the tests of life. Then the Lord opens our eyes to see how great he is in his righteousness and holiness. With Abraham we confess "I am but ashes and dust." We also see how great our God is in the way he finds a way to rescue and save us. Our God developed a plan by which we could be credited with the perfect life and perfect death of his Son to pay for all our sin. Listen to what Paul said in Philippians 3, "That I might be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." We cannot remind ourselves enough each day how great and awesome and glorious our God is.

Job you don't see God's revelations

Our young man Elihu is eager to share more with our suffering friend Job. He wants Job to know that the Lord is there for him, ready to bring revelations into his life. Job has complained more than once that the Lord did not speak to him and give him answers. Elihu told him, "For God does speak, now one way, now another." He shares with Job how the Lord speaks in dreams to frighten people and warn them. Dreams can frighten us as they underscore the evil of some sin that had been committed. Nightmares may lead us to see how frail and empty life is. There may even be dreams about dying. Remember the words of Shakespeare, "To sleep perchance to dream, ah there is the rub."

When I hear Elihu talk so enthusiastically about dreams I again think he is overstating the case to try and get his point across to Job. We know that the Lord has given us a superior revelation here on the pages of the Bible. We don't have to send expensive electronic equipment to Mars to discover how the universe began, because God has spoken to us in the Bible and revealed the origin of the world and the human race. He shows us how sin came into the world and how it affects us here in our hearts and why the city of Santa Maria has already had ten murders in 2008. Here we learn how Jesus came to his earth to become one of us, and how he died to rescue us from the pit.

Elihu even suggests that the Lord uses pain and suffering to help people seek him out and learn more about him. "Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal." C.S. Lewis once said that pain is God's megaphone to get our attention. I remember reading the Bible to man who was dying of cancer with a large lump on his neck. He and his wife started coming to worship after he heard the report that he had cancer. The Lord may even use pain and suffering in our lives to provide opportunities to witness to our faith, and lead others to learn how to escape the pit of eternal death and destruction. The Lord our God is certainly not small when it comes to the variety of ways he reaches out to people to reveal his love for them here in his Word.

Several years ago we showed a video from the Moody Science films with the title, "The Heavens Declare the Glory of God." With the aid of computer animation, we were taken into our solar system, our galaxy and far out into space, almost the way you zoom in and out with a program such as Google earth. But then at the end of the journey the camera took us to a beach and showed us a woman reading her Bible. God wants us to see his glory in the stars, but his ultimate plan is to take us into his Word and help us believe the words of Jesus in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Job you don't see God's rescue

But now let's see where Elihu really shines in his words to Job. He tells Job about an angel or mediator that comes into the lives of people as they approach death. (23) The angel or mediator says, "Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him." The word for angel could also be translated as messenger. In the past the Lord used angels to announce the birth of Jesus and to announce his resurrection from the dead. Today the Lord uses people like you and me to witness to Jesus so they can be spared from going down to the pit. He allows us to let people know the Lord has provided a ransom payment for their sin. He let's us share with people the message that Job proclaimed so clearly, "I know that my Redeemer lives." When we share with someone the ransom price Jesus paid to rescue us, then according to Elihu, "his flesh is renewed like a child; it is restored as in the days of old." People are born again with a new life into God's family as his dear children. Even though their bodies waste away, Elihu tells us, "He prays to God and find's favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy, he is restored by God to his righteous state." People see God's face and shout for joy when they learn what Jesus did to rescue them, and the glorious hope they have beyond this life.

Job gradually lost his integrity. He has lost "the Hallelujah" in his life. His God had become too small. Elihu had his short comings, but overall he does help Job get the Hallelujah back into his life. The rest is up to the Lord who will come to Job in a storm and reveal to him that he is control of the whole world, including the minute details of Job's life. Once again the "hallelujah" will rise from the heart and mouth of Job. Amen.