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Alastair Roberts

God's correction of the righteous man who sins. Peter's final message.

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Transcript

Job chapter 37. At this also my heart trembles and leaps out of its place. Keep listening to the thunder of his voice and the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

Under the whole heaven he lets it go and his lightning to the corners of the earth. After it his voice roars. He thunders with his majestic voice and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard.

God thunders wondrously with his voice. He does great things that we cannot comprehend. For to the snow he says, fall on the earth.

Likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. He seals up the hand of every man that all men whom he made may know it. Then the beasts go into their lairs and remain in their dens.

From its chamber comes the whirlwind and cold from the scattering winds. By the breath of God ice is given and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture.

The clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen.

Hear this O Job. Stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know how God lays his command upon them and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine? Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge? You whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south wind.

Can you like him spread out the skies hard as a cast metal mirror? Teach us what we shall say to him. We cannot draw up our case because of darkness. Shall it be told him that I would speak? Did a man ever wish that he would be swallowed up? And now no one looks on the light when it is bright in the skies, when the wind has passed and cleared them.

Out of the north comes golden splendor. God is clothed with awesome majesty. The almighty, we cannot find him.

He is great in power, justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him. He does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.

With Job chapter 37, Elihu's speeches come to an end as do the speeches of all of Job's friends. Earlier in chapter 36, Elihu had begun reflecting upon God's wonder in creation, the way that he displays his power and his wisdom in such things as the water cycle. In several respects, this passage of Elihu's speech anticipates what the Lord will say when he appears in the chapters that follow.

The direct challenge to Job in which he peppers him with rhetorical questions is Elihu's version of the speech that God gives to Job in chapters 38 to 41. However, perhaps this speech has a different sense coming from Elihu than it does when it comes from the mouth of the Lord. Some commentators, as David Clines mentions, have noticed in the pattern of Elihu's images a progression through the seasons.

In chapter 36, verse 26 to chapter 37, verse 5, we have the season of autumn. It's followed by winter in chapter 37, verses six to 10, or perhaps 13, followed then by spring, which some leave out in verses 11 to 13, and then by summer in verse 14 and that which follows. The imagery used in Elihu's speeches and also in the Lord's speeches that follow join together some more poetic representations of cosmology alongside more phenomenological accounts of the creation and perhaps even some proto-scientific

elements.

As an example of the latter, we might think of chapter 36, verses 27 to 28, where he draws up the drops of water. They distill his mist and rain, which the skies pour down and drop on mankind abundantly. In chapter 38, we see similar meteorological phenomena described using different imagery.

In verses 25 to 27 and 37 to 38, who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt to bring rain on the land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate land and to make the ground sprout with grass? Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the water skins of the heavens when the dust runs into a mass and the clouds stick fast together? This chapter opens with Elihu interrupting his reflection to describe his own response to these phenomena. They provoke awe and trembling with him and he has an immediate physical response. The power and might of the Lord displayed in his handiwork and creation naturally and appropriately provoke fear and dread in his creatures.

The thunder and the lightning are great examples of this. God's power can be seen in the mighty storm. Elsewhere in scripture, the imagery of the storm is associated with actual or imagined theophanic events.

The appearance of the Lord at Sinai is a great example of this. We might also think of Psalm 18, verses 10 to 15. He rode on a cherub and flew.

He came swiftly on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him. Thick clouds dark with water.

Out of the brightness before him hailed stones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. The Lord also thundered in the heavens and the Most High uttered his voice, Hail stones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them.

He flashed forth lightnings and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. In such things we can see the power and the might of the Lord.

We can also perceive his wisdom in the governing of his creation. However, although we perceive his majesty and his might, we lack the wisdom properly to understand what these things mean. Verse seven is difficult to interpret.

The ESV renders the key phrase, he seals up the hand of every man. Literally on the hand of every man he sets a seal. Various proposals for interpreting this expression have been advanced with commentators like John Hartley and Clines.

I think it is best read as a reference to shutting people indoors. By the storm and other inclement weather, God prevents people from going about their customary affairs.

Likewise in verse eight, supporting this reading, the beasts have to retreat to their lairs and dens when the terrible weather comes.

God is the master of all meteorological affairs of every season. Thunder and lightning, ice, rain, snow, all come from the Lord's hand. The clouds are described like messengers and servants of the Lord sent to do his bidding.

Elihu suggests the number of different reasons for which they might be sent in verse 13. They can be sent for correction as a form of cautionary judgment to restore people to the right way. An example of this can be seen in 1 Samuel chapter 12 verses 18 to 19.

So Samuel called upon the Lord and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, pray for your servants to the Lord your God that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil to ask for ourselves a king. In that case, the thunder and the rain were a warning from the Lord to his people to remind them of his power and of their disobedience.

The second reason that Elihu gives is for the land. God cares for the wellbeing of his land and its creatures. His rains may be given to restore the land or to ensure its fruitfulness.

And then for love, God's loyalty to his people is another reason for which he may give rain. In Israel, prayer for rain was associated with the feast of tabernacles in contrast to the agricultural system of Egypt which depended mostly upon the river. In Israel, it was seasonal rains that were dependent upon for fruitfulness.

And drought, as there was through the judgment of Elijah, could be devastating. As he moves towards a conclusion, Elihu addresses Job directly. He wants Job to follow his example in reflecting upon the wonderful works of God in his creation.

Job, he stresses, does not know how or why God controls the creation as he does. God is perfect in knowledge, he has his reasons, but for Job, they are beyond searching out. Job cannot even control the heat of his own garments in the summer, let alone the actions of all of the elements.

As the great creator, the Lord established the firmament, poetically described in verse 18 as like a hard cast metal mirror. By his manner of address to the Lord, Job had been speaking presumptuously as if he was possessed of some greater knowledge that humanity in general lacks on account of their creatureliness. What makes Job think that he can speak to the Lord as if to inform God of something that God did not already know? When the clouds clear and the sun is shining in its full radiance, it is too dazzling to behold.

Verse 22 may refer to the way that the sun shines in the north of the heavens, an image of the awe-inspiring glory of the Lord. Others see here a theophanic image. God is

coming from Mount Zaphon, the mountain of the north associated with deity in Canaanite myth.

This reading is far from persuasive to many commentators, however. Seeing the wondrous power of the Lord in creation and his wisdom in governing all of its meteorological forces should chasten anyone trying to render God scrutable to figure him out. However, we can be certain that he will not violate justice and righteousness.

We may not see how, but we should be able to trust him with these things. The proper response of humanity to their creator is fear, awe, and dread of the one who has the majesty and power of all the creation at his disposal. And indeed, so far transcends them.

Such a God looks upon the humble, but he pays no attention to those who are proud and lifted up in their hearts, who presume to call upon the Lord to give an account of himself, as Job has done. A question to consider, why are the meteorological elements that Elihu singles out fitting images for God's power and rule in creation more generally? 2 Peter chapter one. Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and savior, Jesus Christ, may grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them, you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.

For in this way, there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities. Though you know them and are established in the truth that you have, I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

And I will make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to

recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, 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.

As we start into the book of 2 Peter, we should remark upon some of the distinctive qualities of the book and its difficulties at the outset. The first thing to say is that almost anyone who has read the New Testament carefully has noticed that the book of Jude and the book of 2 Peter have extensive similarities. Beyond this, it has a very different style from the book of 1 Peter.

This is something that was recognised back in the time of the early church. Calvin and others have commented upon it, and various theories have been presented for why it might be the case. Not least the possibility that the creative hand of an amanuensis is very much in evidence in this letter.

The Hellenistic concepts and language have also provoked debate. People wondering whether a Galilean fisherman would write in such terms. The book of 2 Peter also struggled to be accepted as canonical, which might seem strange for a book of genuine Petrine origin.

Others have noticed similarities with 1 and 2 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas, which date from the end of the 1st century, but are post-apostolic works. Then there are internal issues as well. Many read chapter 3 verses 2 to 4 as suggesting that the apostles have already died, which would cause problems, as Peter is clearly one of the apostles himself.

We also know that in the early centuries of the church there was various pseudepigraphical material going around, material that claimed to be written by a particular author, but was not actually written by that historical character. There were a number of such works that claimed to arise from Peter. In light of such considerations, the vast majority of scholars do not believe that the book of 2 Peter was authored by Peter himself.

Richard Borkum, who is one who doubts that Peter is the author, puts forward a theory that somewhat cushions the blow, a theory that need not undermine the authority of scripture. He maintains that the book belongs to a testamentary genre, a genre that was

known to be fictional, and so people reading the text would not be deceived. They would know that they were reading a fictional work, and interspersed with it there were things relating to the present-day situation of those reading it, so they would clearly know that it was not written by the historical Peter.

Rather, a fictionalised personification of Peter was addressing their situation as a faithful yet fictional construct. Attractive as such a theory may be, as a way of cutting the Gordian knot of the questions of the authorship and dating of the book, it is not ultimately satisfying. Thomas Schreiner has raised a number of problems with this theory, observing that the early church was far more hostile towards pseudepigraphical works than Richard Borkum's theory would suggest.

Such works were not merely regarded as pious fictions, but as actual misleading of people. While this might be slightly overstating the situation, it is noteworthy that, of all the books that claimed to be written by Peter that were clearly pseudepigraphical, none of them actually found their way into the New Testament, except for the book of 2 Peter, if it were in fact pseudepigraphical, written by someone other than the person it purports to be written by. Then there is the question of the testamentary genre.

Is it in fact the case that this genre is always fictional? We seem to find examples of this sort of material at various points in the Old Testament, for instance at the end of Jacob's life, or the end of Moses' life, or the end of David's life. Are there established norms of genre that make clear that these are in fact fictional? It's not clear that there are. As for the relationship with the book of Jude, various theories have been put forward.

Some have suggested a common source for the two books. Others have suggested that Jude borrowed from the book of 2 Peter. But the most likely explanation to me seems to be that 2 Peter uses a lot of the material of Jude, Jude being the earlier of the two texts.

As for questions of literary style, we are working with very little material, and it is tricky to judge on such a limited basis. It is even more difficult to judge when we consider the possibilities of different sectaries being involved, and the possibility in both books of the use of extensive prior material. In the case of 1 Peter, there's suggestion that there might be extensive liturgical material included into the book.

And in the case of 2 Peter, the use of material from the book of Jude. Thomas Schreiner has also noted the possibility of allusions to material from the book of 2 Peter, back in works from the end of the 1st century AD, referring his readers to scholarly research that has been done on the subject. The claims that the book of 2 Peter suggests that the apostles have already died is not compelling.

The letter begins with a familiar form of introduction, a style that we find both in Pauline letters and in other secular letters of the time. Peter introduces himself as Simeon Peter, a name used of him elsewhere only in Acts chapter 15. He refers to Jesus Christ as our

God and saviour.

Now that could be read as our God and our saviour, but it seems most likely it should be read as our God and saviour. Usually when such distinction is intended, it's far more clear within the Greek. At the very outset then, we would have a very high Christology.

The faith of the Christians to whom Peter is writing is no less precious than that of the apostles themselves. Their faith is described as being of equal standing, seemingly with the apostles themselves. He goes on to talk about the basis of our salvation, relating it all to his divine power, which in the context would seem to be a reference back to Christ.

We have come to know Christ by his effectual call to glory, and through coming to know Jesus, we have been granted divine power that gives us everything that we need for eternal life. Christ, through his glory and goodness, has given great promises to his people, promises that make them partakers of the divine nature, releasing them from the corruption of this present world on account of sinful desire. In speaking of being partakers of the divine nature, Peter is using Hellenistic language.

We should think about this in terms of what theologians have talked about as God's communicable and non-communicable attributes. God's non-communicable attributes are things like his infinity, his aseity, his omnipotence, his omniscience. No creature can take on these attributes.

However, God's communicable attributes can be taken on by creatures in an analogical sense. So God's holiness, God's humility, God's kindness, God's love, and all these other characteristics are things that we can take on, and in the process, become more godlike. We can become godly, being conformed to the image of God in Christ, taking on something of his character and his glory.

Our faces shine as we reflect his glory. In the light of the fundamental fact of our salvation in Christ, we have an imperative of growth. Verses three to four present our salvation in its most comprehensive and fundamental character as a gracious work of God and of his own initiative, and a gracious work that has sufficiently provided us with everything that we need.

Faith must become fruitful, however, maturing into something fuller. The fundamental posture of trust in God must work itself out into a fuller and richer set of qualities that derive from it. In this, however, we will be growing from the rich soil that God's grace has provided for us, not from our own resources.

As verses three and four make clear, God has given us everything that we need. He presents a chain of qualities, but it's not necessarily a sequence. We don't need to develop these one by one in succession.

Rather, we should be developing them all at the same time. However, the movement

from faith at the beginning to love at the end is probably significant. Love is the capstone of everything.

It is the theological virtue that's prized over all the others, in 1 Corinthians 13, for instance. Because Christ has given us everything that we need for life and godliness, we must pursue such growth. Peter singles out virtue, which we might understand as moral courage, knowledge, which will be a deep apprehension of God's truth in Christ, self-control, self-mastery in the book of Proverbs, for instance, is a mark of maturity, steadfastness, or patience, godliness, a God-fearing character and a life that is oriented to and around God, brotherly affection, a concern for each other in Christ, and then, as the culminating quality, love.

We must pursue these qualities and seek to increase in them, lest we become ineffective or unfruitful. That is the key danger, that our faith is not actually growing. There's a danger of forgetting sins that we have been forgiven, and the new life that we have been brought into.

He charges them to confirm your calling and election. The calling and election stresses God's unilateral action. However, God's unilateral grace to us must be confirmed in our faithful response.

Peter's point here is not dissimilar from that which we find in Philippians 2, verses 12 to 13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. The salvation that we have been given is not just a sort of spiritual life insurance.

Rather, it is something that brings us into a new form of life and fellowship, and we confirm this by actually living the life that we have been given, living out the salvation that has been granted to us. To be given a life and not to live it is a mockery, and so we are called to live out what God has given us, thereby confirming his unilateral work of grace towards us. There is a last judgment according to works, and in God's judgment upon our works, our initial justification will be confirmed.

This will not be a matter of us adding to what God has given us, as if there needs to be some works to complement God's grace, as if God's grace was not enough. As Peter has already said, God has given us everything that we need. Rather, this is the form that God's salvation takes.

This is the path that God has furnished for us, and so those who receive God's salvation enter into it fully by living it out. This is how God's calling and election is confirmed in our lives. Peter is shortly about to die, and this gives its book some of its testamentary character.

He notes that Jesus had told him about the manner in which he would die. In John chapter 21, verses 18 to 19, truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

And after saying this, he said to him, follow me. Peter wants to make preparation for them in the future. He is writing not merely for the present, but for the time when he leaves to ensure that they are prepared for what will come.

And to confirm them in what they have been taught, he talks about the event of the transfiguration. In the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw something of the glory of Christ, a glory that was a reality-filled sign of the glory to come in the great unveiling of Christ at the end. Also a glory that confirms the Old Testament teaching.

The transfiguration is the unveiling of Christ as the majestic king and of his kingdom rule in his father's glory. The transfiguration, Douglas Harouk argues, is an anticipatory apocalypse, much as that experienced by John on Patmos or Saul on the road to Damascus. He writes, because the apostles at the transfiguration have for a moment already seen and heard Jesus Christ enthroned at the end of the ages in his divine majesty and glory, they are now also already certain that he will in fact come to judge the earth and its inhabitants and set up his eternal reign over all things and all peoples.

The transfiguration then is a guarantee of the coming realization of all of the prophetic promises. It's the prophetic word made more sure. It's also important to recognize that for Peter, the future coming of Christ is framed less by the times and dates for some future divine action than it is by the person of Jesus Christ.

The future coming of Christ is the coming revelation of the glory of Christ, a glory that he already possesses and which Peter saw for himself. What we look forward to is not so much a series of eschatological events, but the revelation of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as Peter proceeds to argue in verses 20 to 21, the transfiguration serves to validate and confirm the prophetic word of scripture.

It demonstrates that it is not of human origin or will. It's given by the inspiration of the spirit of God. And in the transfiguration, both the unifying origin, Jesus Christ, the one who speaks God's word, and the referent, the one to whom it points, Jesus, the glorified son of the prophetic word of scripture is disclosed.

The scriptures find their coherence in their common spirit-inspired witness and revelation of the glory that is seen in Jesus Christ. The prominence that the transfiguration is accorded within the second epistle of Peter then merits closer attention. In his commentary on the epistle, Harring suggests that for Peter, it is the transfiguration rather than the cross or the resurrection that is put forward as the decisive Christological

event.

This revelation of the glory of Christ is the revelation of the final truth and reality of all things. The same light that first illumined the world is the light that will dawn in the coming final day. It's the light witnessed on the holy mountain.

Haring remarks, by recalling the glorious apocalyptic event of the transfiguration of our Lord, Peter directs a strong word against the theological rationalisms, reductionisms and relativisms of his age and ours. While he offers a vigorous apologia for the truth of the gospel, he does not appeal to a foundation in universal rational first principles available to everyone everywhere or to an a priori universal religious sense variously modified by historical and cultural experience, the standard post-enlightenment modes of apologia for religious truth. Instead, Peter goes directly to his and the other apostles being eyewitnesses of an apocalypse of the truth of Jesus Christ.

That apocalypse of the truth of all things is itself the origin and criterion of all claims about God and the beginning and end of all things. A question to consider, how might we retell the story of scripture in a way that presented the dazzling glory of Christ seen on the mountain of transfiguration as the center of the entire thing?