

# OpenTheo

## May 7th: Job 35 & 1 Peter 4:7-19

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Elihu challenges Job on the question of justice. Living in the light of the last days.

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## Transcript

Job chapter 35. What does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself, and your righteousness a son of man. Because of the multitude of oppressions, people cry out.

They call for help because of the arm of the mighty. But none says, Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens? There they cry out, but he does not answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God does not hear an empty cry, nor does the Almighty regard it, how much less when you say that you do not see him, that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him.

And now, because his anger does not punish, and he does not take much note of transgression, Job opens his mouth in empty talk, he multiplies words without

knowledge. In Job chapter 35, Elihu gives his third speech, this time addressed to Job. Within this speech, he addresses two key questions that Job has raised.

Francis Anderson summarises them as follows. What is the use of doing good, and why doesn't God answer prayers, particularly the prayers of Job in his suffering? Both of these questions are held together by a concern for the principle of justice, which Elihu raises in verse 2. Behind much of this speech, we can discern Elihu's deeper concern for theological matters. God's character should not be impugned, nor his justice.

By suggesting that he has a right before God that God has not acknowledged, Job presumptuously seems to be placing God in the wrong. That, as far as Elihu is concerned, is completely unjustified. Likewise, in his appeal, he has been putting God, as it were, in the dock, calling God to answer for his actions.

Eric Robinson writes, Tremper Longman argues that what we see at this point is deficiencies not just in the theology of the friends, and maybe Elihu as well, but also in Job. He writes, However, Elihu is also correct in saying that Job thinks not only that he is right, but also that God is wrong. After all, Job wants to pursue God in order to set him straight.

Job himself operates with a strict idea of retribution theology. He believes that his suffering is unjust because he does not deserve it, and such a belief depends on the supposition that suffering results only from one's own sin. While there is a measure of truth to Longman's claim, I believe that Job's position has more to be said for it.

Job has not merely experienced suffering as such. He has experienced signal judgments, the pharaoh of God descending, catastrophic judgments occurring on a single day. Both Job and the friends are justified in seeing this as not just generic suffering.

This is more than just suffering. This is the hand of the Lord. And the question is, why is the hand of the Lord striking his faithful servant? God doesn't just seem to be permitting Job to experience some of the difficulties of life.

He is coming against Job as an enemy. Job, the king of his people, is seemingly singled out by the Almighty as a guilty man, condemned to destruction. This is more, then, than just a matter of suffering to be accounted for, and there is a reason why Job's complaint so focuses upon the theme of innocence.

Much more is going on here than the question of why do bad things happen to good people. The real question is, why does God so signally strike his faithful servant? This is the sort of thing that should only happen if the servant is guilty. But as Job rightly insists, he has done nothing to deserve such treatment.

While he never disputes that he is afflicted by the same sinful frailty as humanity in general, he has made no catastrophic breach of covenant with God that would deserve

such extreme treatment at his hands. The question that Elihu puts upon Job's lips here, what advantage have I, how am I better off than if I had sinned, is one that Job has placed on the mouths of the wicked in chapter 21, verse 15. What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit do we get if we pray to him? It is, we should remember, also the matter of dispute between Satan and the Lord.

In chapter 1, verses 9 to 11, then Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. Is Job merely a mercenary in his religion, hoping to get some gain and profit for himself? In their differing ways, both Elihu and Satan raise this question.

Anderson argues that in his response to this, Elihu argues himself into a corner. From impartiality, he claims, Elihu ends up with indifference. God ends up not caring whether people are righteous or wicked.

However, this may not be completely fair upon Elihu. Elihu wants to give Job a sense of God's transcendence, and the purpose of righteousness is one of the issues at stake here as well. Is our righteousness a claim that we have upon God? Is it a matter of entitlement of the justice that is owed us? Elihu wants Job to recognise that God as the creator of all things is transcendent and above all of these matters.

God cannot be rendered beholden to Job for his righteousness, as if God were in some way dependent upon him. No, the beneficiary of Job's righteousness is not so much Job himself as Job's neighbour. Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself, and your righteousness a son of man.

This may be making a more general claim about righteousness as well, even on the horizontal level. Righteousness is not about establishing our own entitlement, either from God or from our neighbour, but about serving and doing good to our neighbour. This said, however, Elihu may be unfair upon Job again here.

As we saw in Job's speech in chapter 29, Job was very much concerned to do justice for his neighbour. Job's righteousness and fear of the Lord did not seem to be motivated primarily by self-aggrandisement and service of his own interests, or by the desire to establish a claim upon God and others. The question of justice continues beneath the second question, which is why God doesn't answer the prayers of many who cry out to him.

The problem that Elihu identifies here is that many of those who cry out are unjust themselves. To deliver them from oppression would merely give new oppressors the chance to rise up. No, they ignore God, and so God ignores them.

They are appealing to God purely for their own self-interest, and they have seemingly no regard for God himself as the maker of all things and the giver of all good gifts. They are thankless yet demanding. When God does not heed them in their ingratitude and sin, they think that they have been wronged by him.

Yet their own pride is the reason why they cannot be heard. Job is presenting God as if God were in the wrong, yet he is not considering his own posture towards God. Longman writes, Elihu's picture of a disinterested God will be undermined by the Yahweh's speeches at the end.

We know that Job's righteousness is important to God. After all, God has entered a contest over it with the accuser. The Yahweh's speeches do indeed demonstrate God's greatness and sovereignty, but this sovereign God also deigns to address Job.

A question to consider, how might some of Elihu's criticisms of Job find their target? Are there ways that Job has been presumptuous and wrong in his claims about God? 1 Peter 4, 7-19 The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God.

Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Let no one suffer as a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. In the second half of 1 Peter chapter 4 we see the way that life must be lived in the shadow of the day of the Lord to come. The end of all things is at hand.

The last times are introduced by the death and the resurrection of Christ. And Peter is here writing just a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, which would radically transform the world. The nearness of the day of the Lord is a common theme throughout the New Testament writings.

James chapter 5 verse 8, You also be patient, establish your hearts, for the coming of the

Lord is at hand. Romans chapter 13 verses 11 to 12, Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

The night is far gone, the day is at hand. 1 John chapter 2 verse 18, Children, it is the last hour. Revelation chapter 22 verse 12, Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

Philippians chapter 4 verse 5, Let your reasonableness be known to everyone, the Lord is at hand. Almost two thousand years later, what are we to make of this sense of the imminence of the day of the Lord? It may be of some help to draw a distinction between a theology of eschatological imminence and a chronology of eschatological imminence. The New Testament has some sense of chronological imminence.

The day of the Lord is near at hand because the destruction of Jerusalem is near at hand, and the destruction of Jerusalem is the initiation of many of the last day processes. However, a theology of eschatological imminence is something more. It's a recognition of the penultimacy of the present age.

The fact that the reality of the last things is already being worked out in our midst, and the present age is transitory and passing away. The judgment that we await in the future is already in the process of arriving, and the destruction of Jerusalem would be a key inauguration event of the last day judgment. The future that we await at the end is already incipiently operative in the present.

We're already seeing its effects. Christian theologians have talked about the already-not-yet pattern of the New Testament. We already have a reality-filled promise and down payment of what awaits us at the end.

In Christ, the future has already arrived. It just has not yet been widely or evenly distributed. In the life of the body of Christ, we are participating in the powers of the age to come.

As we experience the work of the Spirit in our midst, we are having an anticipatory foretaste of the future and the present. And recognizing all of this, we must be sober, alert, we must stay awake and be vigilant. This is a common message in the New Testament, perhaps most notably in Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 4-8 we read, But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet

the hope of salvation.

We must keep our wits about us, be alert, we must recognize the transitory character of our current activities, and not be overly invested in this present age. It is passing away, and this sobriety is in part for the purpose of prayer. We must watch and pray as Jesus encouraged his disciples, bracing ourselves for the coming of the time of testing.

We must keep ourselves prepared for prayer. This involves keeping short accounts with God and being at peace with our neighbours. Knowing how essential they can be, we do not want anything to hinder our prayers.

We are marked out as children of God by our love, and a commitment to each other will be immensely important when the times of testing come. Love covers a multitude of sins. A similar statement is found in James 5, verses 19-20.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins. Love is needed for solidarity and mutual support, especially in persecution. Love forgives.

It is that that enables us to cover those sins that have been committed against us, and to enable relationships to be healed and restored. Peter charges his hearers to show hospitality. Hospitality would have been very important for the early church, as people were travelling from place to place.

The importance of hospitality is also seen in Jesus' teaching concerning the sheep and the goats. The sheep are recognised in part by the hospitality that they show to the unknown strangers, who are the brothers of Christ. Likewise, when Jesus sends his disciples through the towns and the cities of Israel, the places where they go are faced with a test of hospitality.

How will they receive the messengers that have been sent to them? And Peter wants the people to whom he is writing to show that pattern of hospitality to each other, without grumbling. He talks about the exercise of spiritual gifts, and his teaching here is similar to that which we find in Paul in Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12. The very grace of God that he talks about here is similar to the one gift of the Spirit that is manifested in numerous different gifts of the Spirit.

God's grace has a beautiful diversity and variety to it. It accentuates difference, but in a beautiful unity. The distinctiveness of each is discovered in the mutuality of all.

In Romans chapter 12 verses 4 to 6, For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7, To each is given the

manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. He gives two examples, speaking and serving.

The speaker must speak as one bearing the oracles of God, as one who is handling the word of God. This is not just human speech, it is speech that has weight and must be delivered as such. The other example he gives is that of service, practical service, that must be ministered in the strength that the Lord supplies.

And all of this is for the purpose of God's glory in Christ. And he ends this section with a doxology. The time of testing is about to come, and it will test them and prove them, it will show the actual metal of their faith.

And they should not be surprised that this is coming upon them, it has been announced beforehand. But when it comes, they will be sharing Christ's suffering, recognising that they were told this ahead of time, and recognising God's hand in the events. They will be able to see the purpose of this, testing and proving them so that they might share in Christ's glory, going through the sort of suffering that he underwent in order to enter into the glory that he has entered.

And this leads to a different approach to sufferings. Sufferings are no longer the worst thing that can befall us. In fact, we can find much cause for rejoicing in them.

We are blessed if we are insulted for the name of Christ. This is a sign that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. We have been marked out by his name, and in the eyes of those around us we are identified with him.

This is teaching that is found on various occasions within the New Testament. Philippians 1, verse 29 Matthew 5, verses 11-12 Acts 5, verse 41 Various other translations have been suggested for the word translated meddler, but meddler does seem to be the right interpretation here. Why might it be mentioned? One of the important themes of Peter's letter to this point is the way that Christians should live among the Gentiles as aliens and strangers, and as those who live respectable and quiet lives.

As such, Christians should mostly be those who keep themselves to themselves. While they witness to others, they will not meddle in others' affairs or make a nuisance of themselves. They live peaceably with those around them, and quietly with relationship to wider society.

If they suffer as a Christian, they should not be ashamed. They should glorify God in that name. Suffering as a Christian, it suggests that that term had a particular sting to it.

It was a term that was used by outsiders of believers. The earliest Christian movement did not call itself Christianity. It called itself the Way and other such things.

The term Christian was first used of believers in the city of Antioch in Acts 11, 26. The

term is also used by King Gripper in 26, 28. It seems to be a term that is meant to shame, but there is no shame in being associated with Christ and his name.

Rather, that name ought to be borne with pride. When judgment comes, it begins at the household of God. It is a dangerous place to be near to God.

If you are near to God, you more immediately face judgment. However, within the household of God, you are prepared for judgment. Every single time we come before God, for instance, we are having a sort of rehearsal of the final judgment that we await.

However, those who have rejected the gospel, who are outside, do not have such preparation and will face far more severe consequences. He quotes Proverbs 11, 31. In light of all of this, we should entrust our lives to our faithful creator, while we seek to do good.

We will suffer, but we will be suffering according to his will, the will of our loving Father who created and saved us. A question to consider. Throughout the New Testament, the one thing that Christians are taught to expect in this life is suffering.

Yet suffering is almost always framed by the purpose and loving will of God and by the fact of Christ's return in judgment. We see the reality of what our sufferings here and now are in the light of the transitory and passing character of this present age. What practices could we develop in our personal lives to make us more prepared for suffering when it comes?