

# OpenTheo

## May 6th: Job 34 & 1 Peter 3:8—4:6

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The Almighty God who brings down kings. Following in the footsteps of Christ's victorious sufferings.

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## Transcript

Job 34—Then Elhu answered and said, Hear my words, you wise men, and give ear to me, you who know. For the ear tests words, as the palate tastes food. Let us choose what is right.

Let us know among ourselves what is good. For Job has said, I am in the right, and God has taken away my right. In spite of my right, I am counted a liar.

My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression. What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water, who travels in company with evildoers, and walks with wicked men? For he has said, It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God. Therefore hear me, you men of understanding, far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.

For according to the work of a man, he will repay him, and according to his ways, he will make it before him. Of a truth God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice. Who gave him charge over the earth, and who laid on him the whole world? If he should set his heart to it, and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.

If you have understanding, hear this, listen to what I say. Shall one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn him who is righteous and mighty, who says to a king, Worthless one, and to nobles, Wicked man, who shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? In a moment they die. At midnight the people are shaken and pass away, and the mighty are taken away by no human hand.

For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. There is no gloom or deep darkness, where evildoers may hide themselves. For God has no need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment.

He shatters the mighty without investigation, and sets others in their place. Thus knowing their works, he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed. He strikes them for their wickedness, in a place for all to see, because they turned aside from following him, and had no regard for any of his ways, so that they caused the cry of the poor to come to him, and he heard the cry of the afflicted.

When he is quiet, who can condemn? When he hides his face, who can behold him, whether it be a nation or a man, that a godless man should not reign, that he should not ensnare the people? For has anyone said to God, I have borne punishment, I will not offend any more, teach me what I do not see? If I have done iniquity, I will do it no more. Will he then make repayment to suit you, because you reject it? For you must choose, and not I. Therefore declare what you know. Men of understanding will say to me, and the wise man who hears me will say.

Job speaks without knowledge, his words are without insight. Would that Job were tried to the end, because he answers like wicked men, for he adds rebellion to his sin. He claps his hands among us, and multiplies his words against God.

In Job chapter 34 we come to Elihu's second speech. David Clines argues that it splits into two halves. The first half in verses 2-15 addresses the friends of Job, and the second half in verses 16-37 addresses Job himself.

Clines sees evidence for this in the second person singular address of verses 16, 17 and 33. Eric Robinson, however, claims that it is addressed to the friends, once again on the way that we decide this matter, and on whether we see larger sections of Elihu's words here, as remixed quotations from either the friends or Job, potentially hang a number of other larger issues of interpretation. Robinson's understanding of the addressees of this

passage, along with his belief that a number of passages here are quoting the friends, is a position that might be needed to sustain his positive portrayal of the character of Elihu.

Clines, however, while regarding Elihu as much more critical of Job than someone like Robinson does, nonetheless qualifies his account much more than most commentators, for whom Elihu is often viewed as pompous, arrogant and a bit of a buffoon. Clines writes Elihu opens by addressing the friends, summoning them to a collective act of judgement, to test the words of Job and to see whether they are in fact righteous and true. Elihu restates Job's own position in verses 5 and 6, and then again in verse 9. Job insists that God has not acted justly towards him, he has not given him his due.

Job is a righteous man, yet treated by God as if he were a notorious sinner. He still hasn't given up on his insistence on his righteousness. He hasn't admitted the guilt that others have been imputing to him.

Between his quotations from Job, Elihu gives a characterisation of Job. What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water, who travels in company with evildoers and walks with wicked men? Elihu here seems to be referring to Job's statements that he had made, throwing God's justice and judgement into question. Whether or not Job himself is an evildoer, he definitely has questionable travelling companions on the route that he has chosen.

In chapter 15 verses 15 and 16, Eliphaz had characterised human beings as follows. Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight. How much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water.

Job stands out from other men. He drinks scoffing like water, but to a greater degree than other human beings. Elihu is clearly quite troubled by this.

It is one thing for Job to bewail his condition. It's another thing for him to impugn God's honour and his righteousness. In verse 9, Elihu presents Job as striking at the very base of true religion.

He characterises Job as saying, It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God. Job has indeed said some things that are similar to this. For instance 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? However that was a characterisation of the opinion of the wicked, and Job presumably distances himself from that.

Job's own words in chapter 9 verse 22 were, It is all one, therefore I say he destroys both the blameless and the wicked. Elihu's concern in the verses that follow is to defend God from the apparent claim of his unrighteousness. Or at least of his omission of justice in the case of Job.

God, Elihu highlights, is the one who is the creator and sustainer of all things. He's the Almighty, he's the judge of the whole earth. He providentially rules and upholds all things by his power.

Elihu wants Job to reflect upon what it might mean to claim that such a God is lacking in justice or failing in his duty. This would be a radical claim of an even more than cosmic scale. It would throw everything into uncertainty and disarray.

Might hear something similar to Abraham's statement to the Lord in chapter 18 verse 25 of Genesis, Elihu goes on to argue this case further. By its very definition, to govern is to execute justice. To imagine an unjust God at the helm of the universe is a radical thought.

A thought which Job has probably not followed through. Besides, the impartiality of God in the ruling of the affairs of man can clearly be seen. He shows no partiality, he's not in any particular camp's pocket.

He brings down one prince and raises up another. He does not treat either the rich or the poor with a special preference. He is equipped to judge as the one who is omniscient.

He sees and knows all things about his creation. No creature can hide from his sight. The friends in Elihu may be investigating the case of Job.

God does not have to investigate in that way, he already knows. He overturns unfaithful kings and puts others in their place. He cannot be controlled or summoned by any human being.

He's above human power and demands, even of the richest and most powerful. He owes man no explanation for his ruling in human affairs. He has his reasons and purposes, but they may be beyond human understanding.

He cannot be summoned to any human bar to give an explanation of himself. God Almighty, who sovereignly brings down kings in his power and authority, relates to Job's situation in a very particular way. Job, of course, is a ruler of his people.

Toby Sumter writes, Elihu ties his second speech directly to kings. He says that people do not just go up to kings and correct them. On the other hand, God is not partial to men in authority either.

God can speak to those people and correct them, and he does not regard the rich more than the poor. They are all the work of his hands. Therefore, Elihu says it is God's place to rebuke kings and nobles.

He does this providentially, when bad things happen to them, when calamities strike suddenly. Perhaps the implication of all of this is that since God has brought down Job,

the matter has clearly been decided and settled. Eric Robinson reads this argument differently.

He writes, Elihu's argument is that God has put the governors of people in places he has chosen. He removes those who no longer have a heart for him, and there is no evidence that Job is not a righteous judge. God knows what he is doing and will leave a person in place who will come to him at the proper time, and it is not a wise man's place to say when that time should be ended.

God is not obligated to punish or rebuke according to these wise men's ways. As Lighthart has pointed out, Elihu desires to justify Job. Chapter 33 verse 32 Therefore, their arguments against Job are moot on the basis that 1. They have no evidence to charge Job with wrongdoing, since he is an impartial judge.

Chapter 34 verses 17 to 19 and 2. God knows exactly what he is doing in Job to bring him inwardly to the proper position before God. The concluding verses of this chapter are very difficult both to translate and to interpret. For instance, even after considering knotty questions of translation, we are still left to determine whether the concluding verses of the chapter are the words of Elihu or the words of the men of understanding and the wise man that he begins to quote in verse 34.

Is Elihu identifying himself with these opinions, or is this something that he is just reporting to Job? Clines writes, for instance, Elihu would like to envisage himself as being truly on Job's side, but he is aware, so he says, of a groundswell of opinion against Job. The view among thinking people is that, in his assaults on God, Job has taken up the position of the godless. Verse 36b Getting himself deeper and deeper into sin by the tone of his speeches.

Verse 37 Others are saying that such a stubborn Job needs to suffer even greater trials. Verse 36a Elihu himself, so he professes, is not saying anything so harsh. He is encouraging Job to give up his recalcitrance and take the penitent stool, but he cannot hide the fact that others are being far less sympathetic.

A question to consider, where else in scripture do we encounter portraits of God's righteous providential rule over kings and empires? 1 Peter 3-8-4-6 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. For to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good, let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him. Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. For the time that has passed suffices for doing what Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties and lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you, but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to them who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 1 Peter 3, verses 8-12 concludes the section of instructions that began in 2, verse 11.

It presents six characteristics of faithful Christians, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts, humble minds and blessing rather than reviling. Unity of mind is a common theme within the New Testament. If we have the mind of Christ we will be united, and we won't be constantly at odds with each other.

We are called to have sympathy or compassion, entering into other people's joys and sorrows, weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. We must have love for brothers and sisters in Christ. Throughout the New Testament this is one of the defining characteristics of the people of Christ.

We must have hearts that are tender, kind, open to being moved. Our hearts must not be closed to people, they must not be calloused. Christians must have humble minds,

meekness, concern for others before ourselves, not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, a sense of the greatness of God and the needs of our neighbours, and a sense of how small we are in the light of God's greatness.

This should inform all of our thinking. In the activity of our minds we can often be puffed up and proud, but yet true wisdom is found in the fear of the Lord. It begins with this posture of humility, and it never ceases to be characterised by this.

We must have a posture of blessing towards others. We've been called to obtain a blessing, and as Christians we participate in the giving of what we receive in the Gospel. We are forgiven, so we forgive.

We have been blessed, so we bless. We have been given the Spirit as the people of God, so we minister the Spirit to others. And to solidify this point, he quotes at length from Psalm 34.

As Charles Cranfield notes, Peter has rephrased the quotation to accent its reference to the age to come. The life that the psalmist, as quoted by Peter, desires to love is not so much the life of the present day, but the life to come. And blessedness, which we await from the Lord, comes to those who follow the instructions of the psalmist.

And verse 13 continues the thought of the quotation from Psalm 34. It could be translated, And who is he who will be doing you evil? This follows on from verse 12, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. If we are zealous for what is good, and wholehearted in our pursuit of it, no evil can ultimately harm us, no matter how fiercely it might assail us.

This is similar to Paul's point that he makes in Romans 8, verses 31-39. More than that, who was raised? Who is at the right hand of God? Who indeed is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Indeed, in addition to the fact that no suffering will ultimately harm us, we are promised that if we suffer for righteousness' sake, we will be blessed.

Here he takes up the point of Jesus in Matthew 5, verses 10-12 at the end of the Beatitudes. This is taken from Isaiah chapter 8, verses 11-13. These are the verses that immediately precede those concerning the stumbling stone, which he has already alluded to in the preceding chapter.

We should also note that Christ the Lord fills the place where the Lord of hosts was in the original quotation. Such uses of Old Testament texts in the New Testament is an important line of evidence for the deity of Christ. The New Testament authors were prepared to take Old Testament scriptures that were clearly about God himself and use them to refer to Christ.

Christians are charged to give an answer for their hope. Maybe this is an actual trial in the case of persecutions, or just when we are questioned by our neighbours and others around us. We must think diligently so as to be able to answer such questions well when we are put on the spot.

And we must do so with gentleness and respect. These themes have been central throughout. These are characteristic of the way that Christians relate to their neighbours.

We also act with a good conscience. We maintain blameless and exemplary lives. We are transparent in our godliness.

We aren't driven by fear, resentment or anger, as Cranfield argues, but by integrity. Over time this can put false accusers to shame. Once again, as he did when he spoke to slaves about their suffering, he speaks of the goodness of suffering for doing good.

As he says in chapter 2 verses 19-20, And from here, as he did previously, he moves into the example of Christ's suffering so that the righteous one suffering unjustly. Christ's suffering should be our model. The suffering of Christ, however, is redemptive.

It brings us to God. It opens up a new and living way and removes the obstacle of sin. Christ was put to death in the flesh.

He took the Adamic weak flesh that was under judgment and bore the judgment that lay upon it. But he was made alive in the spirit, in the resurrection. Peter's distinction between flesh and spirit is much the same as Paul's is.

The verses that follow are some of the most debated in the whole of Peter's writings. Who are the spirits in prison? What does it mean that Christ proclaims to them? Various theories have been put forth. Some talk about people being in spiritual bondage.

Others have seen here the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell. Others still have seen a reference back to Genesis chapter 6 and the angelic sons of God who took human women and had relations with them. This story was narrated in more detail in the apocalyptic intertestamental text, the book of Enoch.

It seems to me that this event is also referred to in 2 Peter chapter 2 verses 4-5. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment, if he did not spare the



ancient world, but preserve Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. And then also in Jude verse 6. And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Considering that the spirits are associated with the time of the building of the ark, considering the use of the term spirits, and considering references to this narrative elsewhere in the New Testament and particularly within the writing of Peter, it seems most likely to me that this is a reference back to Genesis chapter 6 and the stories surrounding it. What then does it mean that Christ preached to the spirits in prison? And when does that take place? Their disobedience took place in the days of Noah. But it seems to me that Christ preaching to them occurred in the spirit during the period between his death and his resurrection, or perhaps some might argue after his resurrection and ascension.

The preaching in question is Christ's declaration of his victory over them. It is not a preaching that can lead to salvation. It is rather a preaching that seals their defeat.

Reading passages like this in Revelation chapter 12 verses 7 to 12, we should remember the cosmic dimensions of the work of Christ. Christ is defeating the rebellious angels and he's reordering the heavenly realms. During the time of the rebellion of these angels, prior to the flood, God's patience waited and the ark was prepared, but only a few, a remnant of eight people were brought safely through the waters.

Peter makes a remarkable comparison of this with baptism. Just as Noah and his family were delivered through the waters of the flood, so Christians are delivered through the waters of baptism. The waters of the flood drowned the old world and the enemies of the people of God, and the waters of baptism symbolically drowned the old world and all the devils that pursue us.

It is an exceedingly strong claim to say that baptism saves us. What might Peter mean? Some have tried to empty this statement of its force, but while Peter is concerned to say how baptism saves us, he does not make the statement only to empty it. For Peter, it seems, the rite of baptism is truly saving.

He makes clear what he does not mean by this. It does not save as a removal of dirt from the body. It's not just a physical rite that works in a magical way, as if you could wash your flesh in the waters of baptism and instantly be saved.

That is not how baptism works. Baptism's efficacy does not reside in mere water. Rather, baptism saves as the answer of a good conscience towards God, and its efficacy comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The efficacy of baptism is like the efficacy of a wedding ceremony for a loving union between a man and his wife. While a baptism or wedding ceremony can create a formal relationship, the true efficacy of such ceremonies depends upon a wholehearted self-rendering over time, as we faithfully live out the meaning of what we have been committed to in the ceremony itself. In the case of baptism, we are baptised into Christ.

We are baptised into his death, buried with him, in order that we might be raised with him on the last day. That event of burial with Christ in baptism is a marking out of our bodies for that future event of resurrection. Baptism suspends us between the event in the past, the death of Christ, and the event in the future, the resurrection of our bodies that we anticipate.

And the efficacy of baptism is the efficacy of resurrection itself. That's where baptism gets its power, from the future in which it will be confirmed by God raising us from the dead. This Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead has gone into heaven.

He has triumphed and been exalted over all angels, authorities and powers, which are now subject to him. He will reign until all things have been put under his feet, as Psalm 110 verse 1 declares. Recognising the pattern of Christ and his sufferings, we must take the same course.

Peter describes in generic terms the way that the person who follows Christ's example will behave. Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. Although people's former way of life might have been characterised by a pursuit of their passions, now that they have taken on the mantle of Christ, they follow a very different course.

They have ceased from sin. That pattern of behaviour that they once gave themselves to is no longer habitual for them, and now they live for the will of God. There is a watershed point in their lives, between before and afterwards.

In the before time, they had all the time that they wanted for living as the Gentiles do, for sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties and lawless idolatry. All of these practices that brought no profit, and the people who continue to practice these things, are surprised when Christians don't join them in them. Yet these behaviours are a sort of flood of debauchery that they are being drowned under, and though they speak ill of Christians, their judgement is near at hand.

They will have to give an account to the one who will judge the living and the dead. Verse 6 is another difficult verse to understand, for this is why the Gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. Is this a reference back to the spirits in prison that were mentioned previously? I don't believe that it is, rather I think it relates to the

preceding verse.

Christ is going to judge the living and the dead, and the Gospel has been preached even to those who have died, even though they have suffered the consequences of death in the flesh the way that people more generally do, they might live in the spirit the way that God does, and they will be raised on the last day. Concerns about the death of Christians seem to have been common within the early church, as it wasn't entirely clear to some how those who died prior to the second coming of Christ would participate in his resurrection. Here, as Paul does in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians, Peter wants to assure his hearers that those who have died in Christ, who have heard the Gospel and responded to it, will also live in the spirit with them, they will also be raised up.

A question to consider, Peter here uses the story of the flood as an example of the salvation that Christians have received. The story of Noah and the ark and the flood more generally is referred to on a number of occasions in the New Testament as a paradigmatic example of judgment. What are some of the other occasions when it is used as an example, and what lessons can we learn from it for understanding the judgment of God?