

(Job: An Epic in Brokenness) 3. the Message of Elihu

by Roy Hession

Elihu's message in Job emphasizes the importance of humility and the restorative nature of suffering while challenging self-justification and affirming God's justice.

Duration: 56:19

Scripture: Job 29:2, Job 30:1, Job 31:29-31, Job 32:7, Jeremiah 36:2, Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:23

Topics: "Brokenness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the book of Job and its various chapters. He highlights how Job's friends were amazed and stopped speaking, allowing Job to finally have a chance to speak. Job expresses his innocence and his desire for God to speak. The preacher emphasizes that God speaks in two ways - through words and through pain and suffering. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of repentance and restoration in one's relationship with God.

Transcript

Look at the book of Job again, and you can turn, if you will, to chapter twenty-seven. We've come to the point when the three men have had each their say, and they've said it three times. They've had three rounds.

And Job has never let them get away with anything. He's got an answer for every one of the things they said, so each man speaks three times, that's, there were nine speeches, and Job has a nine-fold reply to every one of them. Now, after that's happened, there appears on the scene a new character, and there is heard a new voice from a man much younger than them, who, because of his junior status, had remained quiet, though his heart was burning to add to the discussion.

And at last, when they've given up, and when Job has given up, he then begins to speak. His name is Elihu, and he rarely does speak for God in a way that Eliphaz, Bildad, Bildad, and Zophar did not do. He rarely has got God's word for the situation.

Even that isn't enough. Later, God himself is heard speaking out of the whirlwind, but what Elihu has to say is a very obvious and right preparation for the actual audible speech of God that really finished Job off. And so Elihu's message is a very, very important one, and that's why I deferred mentioning C.S. Lewis

until we came to Elihu, because you might almost say that C.S. Lewis is the Elihu of today.

Before, however, turning to what Elihu has to say, I want you to listen first to the concluding moments of the dialogue between Job and his three friends. In chapter 27, Joab is giving his last answer to these men, and this really sums up what he has to say and demonstrates more clearly than any other portion his attitude, because Elihu didn't deal with the reason for Job's sufferings, but he dealt with Job's attitude in his sufferings, and that is obviously what God is after with us. Well, now here you have a summary, the last part that really summarises Job's attitude.

I'm reading from the NIV, the new international version. I've had to consult all the way through both the NIV and the RSV as well as the authorised version. No one version has got it, as I understand, completely right, and therefore I found it necessary to consult all three.

If you said, now, I want to really get down to Job itself, which version shall I treat? Well, if you're not actually having to preach and assess the relative value of this and that translation, I think probably, in the case of Job, the NIV might be the simplest to read, though there are points that I think they've missed, which the authorised version has got and so on, but that's the way it is. You see, it isn't as if everybody disagrees with the authorised version, that all the new versions are better. The new versions don't agree with themselves.

And what is a little disturbing, they don't only give you the same message in different words, but they give you a different message. A verse means a different thing in a different version. This is a problem.

But it needn't really be a problem. It ought to drive you the more to study and think for yourself and seek what God's meaning is. And Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is on record as saying, the man who's taught of the Holy Ghost, he knows which is the right translation.

We are not left at the mercy of differing scholars. But this very variety might exercise ourselves more unto godliness, more unto study, more unto deep thought. Arrive at your own conclusion as you compare this and that.

And so, as I say, one has it so well in another and another. But as I say, just for general purposes, this book of Job, which is in this imprecise poetic language, every translation has had difficulties with it. I think probably if you want to go through, well, let me get down to it myself, well, I would say take the NIV.

That probably will serve your purpose best of all, if it is a straightforward reading of it that you require. Certainly these verses which summarize Job's words and attitude are well put and made more simple in the NIV. Chapter 27, And Job continued his discourse, As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty who has made me taste bitterness of soul, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.

I will never admit that you're in the right. The authorized verse says, God forbid that I should justify you. I won't admit you're in the right, because you're not.

I'm in the right. I will never admit that you're in the right. Till I die I will not deny mine integrity.

I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it. My conscience will not reproach me as long as I live. So that's put pretty clearly.

That really summarizes how he felt about it. And that of course in turn led him to say that he was right not only with regard to them, but that he was right with regard to God too, which meant that he was charging God with injustice. Well, it's taken him 27 chapters to summarize it as clearly as that, but there it is.

These old Orientals, they were talkers. They were philosophizers. Even Elihu, he's been a bit pompous in places, and very verbose.

We've got to bear with them. It was the culture of the day. Oh, they were intellectuals.

Intellectualism hasn't begun with our generation. It was there long before, and the intellectualism of the ancients is probably far deeper and greater than of modern writers. But of course it's very foreign, this amplifying of things to our way of putting it.

We've been used to our newspapers, which summarizes things. And that's what the preacher today has got to do. He's got to get hold of the Scripture, get deep in it, and summarize it to the modern mind.

Well then, that's in his last discourse to his three friends. Then in chapter 29, he has that very poetic chapter in which he tells of his former prosperity and happiness. Oh, that it were with me as in times past.

Then in chapter 30 he tells in melodramatic form the sudden reversal of his fortunes. And then in chapter 31, 29, 30 and 31, he has that great protestation of his innocence. And that chapter ends up with the words of Job are ended.

Thank goodness for that. Now God has a chance to speak. And God only has a chance to speak when your words are ended.

Well, he couldn't have said more than he did. And so, we then come to chapter 32. I'm reading from the authorized version this time.

So these three men ceased to answer Job because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu. Haven't heard about him before, but here he is standing in the wings.

Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel, the Buzite of the kindred of Ram. Against Job was his wrath kindled, not because he'd done some sin in the past, but because he justified himself rather than God. That's an important word.

He justified himself rather than God. If Job was really right, and really just and innocent, then God, according to ordinary standards, was wrong in afflicting him as he did. And as Job insisted that he was right, it meant that he was implying that God was wrong.

And he justified himself rather than God. In great contrast to the publicans and the sinners in the New Testament, who under the preaching of John the Baptist, we read, they justified God, being baptized of John in Jordan, confessing their sins. They said, Oh God, you're right.

We're wrong. And that is always the chief element of repentance. God is right, and I'm wrong.

And sin is meant to justify God. That's how David saw it. He said in Psalm 51, Against thee, thee only have I sinned, undone this great wickedness, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Oh God, if nothing else has happened as a result of my sin, it's justified you in what you said about men. I didn't believe all men were sinners. I did believe the others were, but not me.

But this that I've done proves thee to be clear in what you said. But not so with Job. He insisted that he was right.

And in one sense, we know he wasn't guilty of some extraordinary unpleasant heinous sin. But, if he was right, then he was implying that God was wrong, and hadn't dealt with him justly. Remember that.

When you say you're right, when you say, what have I done to deserve this, you're justifying yourself rather than God. And this is the point that this man picked on. The other men were looking into his past, to find some sin to account for his sufferings.

Job says, I'm not talking about a sin that has produced your sufferings, I'm talking about your sin in those sufferings. He dealt not with some fancied action of Job, but with his attitude. And this, of course, was what God was after.

And this is what God's after. You can have an argy-bargy with someone, they're accusing you, you're justifying yourself. God's not very bothered about the initial thing in which you're having your argy-bargy about.

But in your attitude of declaring yourself to be right, you may be right, but it's wrong to say so. Because in God's sight, there's only one who's wholly right, and that's God. Not you.

And God's allowed that thing, even their criticism. And if I need to repent of nothing else, I need to repent of justifying myself, the terrible sin of self-righteousness. I won't be wrong.

Well, I'm not wrong! There was someone who was not wrong, and he took the place of the wholly wrong. Couldn't you do the same? No. And this is the battle.

And Elihu is aroused with anger about this thing, a righteous, wholly anger. Verse 3, He also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they found no answer and yet had condemned Job. Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were older than he.

When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled. And Elihu, the son of Baracha the Bazaïd, answered and said, I am young and you are very old, wherefore I was afraid and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, days should speak and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged necessarily understand judgment. Therefore I said, hearken to me, I also will show my opinion.

Behold, I waited for your words, I gave ear to your reasons, while ye searched out what to say. Yea, I attended unto you, and behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words. Lest ye should say, we have found out wisdom, God thrusteth him down, not man.

Now he hath not directed his words against me, neither will I answer him with your speeches. They were amazed, they answered no more, they left off speaking. When I had waited, for they spake not, but stood still and answered no more, then I said, I will also answer also my part.

I will also show mine opinion, for I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. And I be inside, I am like bottled up wine, like new wine skins ready to burst. And so he then proceeds to give his contribution.

And it is quite different from what the others had to say. Wherefore, Job thirty-three, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold now, I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth, my word shall be of the uprightness of my heart, and my lip shall utter knowledge clearly.

The spirit of God hath made me, the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me. Stand up.

Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead. I also am formed out of the clay. Job had previously complained that God was unapproachable, he didn't seem to answer, he couldn't bring his case.

And he said, there's no daysman between us. That's an old English word for an umpire. There's no umpire between us that may lay his hand upon us both.

That he can interpret me to God and God to me. All right, says Elihu, I feel in some measure I can fulfill that lack. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead.

At the same time, I'm like you. I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be ever upon thee.

And now he gets down to the thing he's got to say. Surely, thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I've heard the voice of thy word saying, I am clean, without transgression, I am innocent, neither is there iniquity in my hands. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, he putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths.

He's quoting what he understood Job to have said, and that was right. He says to him, Behold in this, thou art not just. I will answer thee that God is greater than man.

Why dost thou strive against him, complaining that he giveth not account of any of his matters? Because God does speak. Job would complain that God didn't seem to speak, didn't seem to answer. This man says he does.

For God does speak. I'm mixing up the versions, I'm not going to tell you which is which, just get the sense of it. For God does speak, now one way and now another, though man perceiveth it not.

And the first way in which God does speak, he says, is in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed, then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction. With what purpose? That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride or cut off pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

And then he goes on to say there's a second way in which God does speak. He, man, is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out.

Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers, if there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man what is right for him. Then he is gracious unto

him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's.

He shall return to the days of his youth. He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him. He shall see his faith with joy, for he restoreth to him his righteousness, his right relationship with God.

He singeth with joy to men, and says, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it was not required to me. It wasn't counted against me. He has delivered my soul from going into the pit, and my life shall see the light.

Lo, these things worketh God oftentimes with man, what for? To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me, hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast anything to say, answer me, speak, for I desire to justify thee.

If not, hearken unto me, hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom. Now, there are about seven chapters, six or seven chapters, which contain Elihu's word and contribution to the discussion. And it's clear from this chapter and other chapters that Elihu does two things.

First of all, and very prominently, he charges Job with the wrong of his attitude, whereby he not only justifies himself, but condemns God. He charges God with injustice. The NIV translated, he complains that God has denied him justice.

In answer to that, Elihu says, how wrong that is, Job. How wrong you are to say such a thing. God is greater than man.

And, he challenges this attitude in Job. He does not say, as the others did, that his sufferings were due to his sin. But he says, in those sufferings, you have indeed sinned.

These very attitudes you've demonstrated of self-justification and blaming God and thinking he's unjust towards you, is itself real sin. And he doesn't spare Job. If the others didn't spare Job on these hypothetical sins, this man doesn't spare him in what he says.

And he quotes, on several places, exactly what Job said. Indeed, Elihu gives us a better summary of Job's words and attitudes than Job himself did, because Job is so full of many words. But Elihu pinpoints it.

He's not charging Job with the wrong of some supposed actions in the past, but of his present attitude in the present, under the hand of God. And I believe this is an authentic word from God, not only to Job, but to us. God wants to show us, through some Elihu, if in no other way, the wrong.

Of our attitude. Our self-pity, maybe, our complaining, and our saying, what in the world has induced God to do this to me, when I'm so right? This is a travesty of justice. And we charge God with folly.

And this can be our attitude under severe trials and sufferings, under small ones, pinpricks. But we can still take up the same attitude of justifying ourselves, resenting others, and going further, complaining to God, which in effect is what it is. It's not our actions so often that God wants to deal with, but our attitudes of self-justification, and even implying that God's forgotten you, and hasn't done the right thing.

How impossible. God is greater than man, and he's incapable of acting unjustly. You may not understand why it's happened, but you must never entertain that.

And when you do, you must see it as sin. But then he does another thing, and this perhaps is of particular importance to us. He brings forth an entirely different view of suffering, especially the suffering of the godly that had been put forth before.

They had really, the others, had really implied that his sufferings were penal. That because of their moral philosophy, it was quite certain that somewhere or other he must have done something wrong. And this was a punishment.

Not so does Elihu speak. And his view, and I'm sure it's authoritative, the viable view from God, that suffering and tests and trials, things going wrong, are not punitive in their intention, but only and always restorative. This is what he says.

He says God has two ways of speaking. One, through dreams and visions. Well, I think that includes any direct speech of God to yourself.

I personally have never had a dream that made any sense at all. I dream every night of my life. There's one thing about my dreams, they do reveal something about me.

I'm always frustrated in my dreams. I can't get to the meeting on time. Or something else.

I can't find the way into the house. Well, I think that's true, I am. I do get frustration.

It's something very prone, and it comes out in my dreams. But it's never a word much from God, except to emphasize that's my problem. Frankly, I'm a little bit dubious about people's dreams and visions.

If you have a dream, keep it to yourself. Keep the vision to yourself. Because when you talk about a vision you've had, a sort of halo grows around your head.

And you assume an authority. And God spare us if you start having visions about other people. And because you've gained this sort of reputation, we'll all stand in awe of you.

We don't want to stand in awe of you. You're a sinner like the rest of us. But God does, certainly in times of revival.

God speaks through dreams. Hundreds, thousands have been saved in times of revival in East Africa. Many a man had a vision of hell, and it led him to find Christ.

Others had other visions. And those visions are right and authentic, which have a sweet result. And if it leads a man to Jesus and to peace, then that's just fine.

I accept that. But many of them you can't be too sure about. And in Indonesia, many of those Muslims had a dream of a heavenly visitant coming to them and say, go to that missionary, go to that pastor, ask him what you must do to be saved.

And the pastor was astonished to find a Muslim on his doorstep. Ask him a way of salvation. Because God had spoken to him.

But, I think, this manner of speech really includes all manner of speech to man. And the more normal for the saint of God is he speaks to you by his Holy Spirit. He knows how to make his will known if you're open to it.

He opens the ears of men for instruction. And what for? There you have it, verse 7. That he may withdraw man from his purpose. And... Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast wind it in either direction. That he may withdraw man from his purpose and hide pride, cut off pride from man. And God is out to speak to us, to withdraw us from our purpose.

There's something we want to do, some itch, some course we want to take. It's self-initiated. And God is often speaking to you through his word, through the Holy Ghost, through the ministry of his word, to withdraw man from his purpose.

He knows it's destructive. He knows it will lead you to the pit and to sorrow. And therefore he speaks to withdraw us from our purpose and to cut off pride from man.

That would only have led to pride. You're proud, you're this and that. Oh, thank God.

He doesn't let us down, and thank God he doesn't let us off. I don't want him to let me off. Speak, Lord.

Withdraw me from my purpose. Cut off pride from me. But very often, God's speech in that way is not heeded, is not recognized, and therefore he has another way of speaking.

Verse 19, Man is chastened also with pain upon his bed. And so God speaks to us by pain, very often. C.S. Lewis says, God whispers to us in our pleasures.

I haven't quite got that phrase. He talks to us in something else, but he shouts at us in our pains. Hmm? All right, I'll talk up twice as loud.

And God, whereas he whispers to us in our joys, when it comes to our pains, he shouts at us. You really have to heed. And here again, the purpose of these sufferings, it may not only be personal sickness, it may be the loss of loved ones, it may be things going wrong, things going awry in your Christian service.

What is his purpose in allowing these things? It is, verse 30, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. It is remedial. It is restorative.

Never, never, are our sufferings, whatever they may be, to be regarded as punitive in their intention. No matter how severe, no matter how closely allied to some particular sin or failing in our lives, that thing that's happened is never to be regarded as punitive, but only and always restorative. May I tell you why they cannot be regarded as punitive, why they cannot be regarded as an adequate punishment for sin, because they're not adequate as a punishment? That sorrow, that deprivation, a punishment for your sin, you don't know, I don't know what sin is.

Is that, grieves us, it may be anything like an adequate punishment for sin, as God sees it. There's only one adequate punishment for sin, and that is that which Jesus bore in his body on the tree. When the innocent one had to cry, my God, my God, why hast thou saken me? Because he took our sins and our sorrows and he made them his very own.

He bore the burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone. That's the only adequate punishment for sin. And what a punishment to put to shame the Son of God himself.

No, no, the things that we may suffer can never therefore be regarded as punishments. They're always and ever restorative in their intention. They're designed to bring you to penitence.

They're designed to reach something you hadn't seen. They're designed to restore you back to God in a way you hadn't been before. Again I say, it matters not how closely allied to the sin that suffering is, cause and effect, but even so, it's only to restore.

That sinner, right to his dying day, in jail, suffering the penalty of his sins according to the human law, given God's intention, is meant to restore him. And there's always hope right to the very end. Because God's merciful and wants abundantly to pardon.

And if under the chastening of God that man will humble himself, he will indeed be restored. Manasseh, in the time of his distress, the wickedest man in the Bible it is said, in the time of his distress in that Babylonian dungeon, humbled himself greatly. Did ever man deserve, more deserve what he had? But it wasn't a punishment.

It was designed to achieve this, and it had its effect. He humbled himself greatly and God had met him in that dungeon. Not only forgave his sin, but he could hardly believe it, he was restored to his kingdom.

And he spent the rest of his days putting right what he'd done wrong. Always and only restorative. Now this applies to the most godly, the most conscientious, and the most obedient.

You say, if it's restorative, that seems to imply that we've gotten away. Yes, it does. But in the case of such a man, as you've just mentioned, as far as I can see, probably as far as he can see, he hasn't gotten away.

In spite of that fact, there are still areas in every man's life where self reigns. Often unsuspected. And God yet needs to restore the most conscientious, the most obedient, to himself more deeply.

I think we're inclined to underestimate the tremendous debark that the fall of man was. The terrible destruction that Satan achieved. And what God's on, he's on a restoratory operation for every one of us.

And that's not the work of a day or of a year. It begins when we're first saved and born of his spirit and Jesus comes in. But that's only the beginning.

There's much to go on. There are areas where self still reigns instead of Jesus. And God has work to do in even the most obedient Christian.

And therefore, he uses adversity sometimes. He uses sickness in order to provoke him to see what it is God wants him to see and bring him back. So often revival and conviction begins with the best.

It's very often the most godly man in the church who's the first at the cross and seeing things. Nobody thought there was much wrong with him but God showed him there was. He's on a restoring operation with every one of us.

Restoring this defaced image of God in us. And it isn't over with any. And so it is when you find yourself in any suffering, any trouble, you are not to say, what have I done to deserve this? That's not the issue at point at all.

But rather, what is God teaching me? For none teaches like him. I'm not suggesting for a moment that you deserve that trouble. But I can only say you need it.

You need it. If everything went your way, you'd be impossible. How imperious.

Lord of all you survey. How difficult you'd become with other people. And God knows we need humbling.

Even the godly need humbling. Those who cannot put their finger of any one sin but there are areas where self still reigns. We need it.

If only, to give us a chance to do what C.S. Lewis calls dance, Adam's dance backward. Adam went dancing away from God, putting self first. And we need opportunities to reverse that, to tread that dance backward.

And you can't learn it unless things cross your path which are contrary to what you would naturally wish for yourself. You wouldn't naturally wish that thing. But God's let it come in.

His providence has brought it in. And you then have a chance to embrace God's will rather than yours, a new chance to die to what you would naturally wish. And that is treading Adam's dance backward.

And therefore this is something of what Elihu was after. All these things are in order to withdraw man from his purpose and cut off pride from man that he may keep back his soul from the pit and his life from perishing by the sword. Unless you learn to die more, you're in for trouble.

I don't care you may be as consecrated as you know how, but unless you need to die. You see, you don't only surrender the fallen self, but the natural self. You see, self-surrender, brokenness, is not only due to sin.

That natural desire for this, that and the other about which there's nothing culpable. God said, are you prepared to give that up? For instance, it's natural for us to want to express ourselves. Children must express themselves.

Adults must express themselves. But sometimes you're in a situation where you can't do that. And you're called upon by God to reign dumb and be put back.

It's natural, not sinful, to want to express ourselves, but sometimes you're called upon to surrender up the natural. Is it Oswald Chambers that says, the natural, when surrendered to God at his command, becomes spiritual. But when the natural, we refuse to surrender it at his command, it becomes carnal.

And so this great element of the Christian life is true. It's true even of unfallen man. Holiness for the unfallen man was the constant surrendering of the natural to the will of God.

Nature said he wanted to sleep. God said, I've got a job for you. And he had the choice, should I do what I want or do what God wants? He denied his natural desire for sleep to go on that new errand.

The false simply considered it, he didn't deny the natural. And then it became carnal. And that's our own story.

And so it is, we may not deserve this and that, but we may need it. We need it. And we can't be pleasurable to God and accept this when he says, yes Lord, and we aren't going to be of much use in his service, save if we're willing to walk the way of dying to live the way of the cross.

In order that you might see where Elihu really expands on this, turn to chapter 36. This is what he's saying. Verse 7. Elihu is asserting that no matter what Job thinks, God is righteous.

Verse 7. And he deals righteously with people. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous, but with kings are they on the throne. Yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted.

But if such people be bound in fetters and beholden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their air to discipline and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and observe him, they shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasures.

But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword. They shall plunge on to that thing from which God was trying to save them. They shall die without knowledge.

He showeth them their work, their transgressions, when they find themselves bound in fetters and holden with the cords of iniquity. And then in verse 15 he says, in the authorised he delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. But the revised versions, here I think they're more accurate, he delivereth the poor by his affliction, and openeth their ears by the oppressions which they suffer.

So I have to ask myself, what is God teaching me? What is he getting at? Maybe there's no particular sin you've done except an attitude, except the old Adam that has to die a little more, and maybe that's the reason. That gives me a new opportunity to give up what I would wish for myself and gladly accept that, because up to now it's always been what I wanted. That this might be effective, now this is important, this is the last part of our talk this morning, that this might be effective, there needs to be an interpreter, one among a thousand, who will show unto man what is right for him.

I'm quoting from chapter 33, verse 23. This is God's purpose, but it needs, if there be a messenger with him, with man, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man what is right for him, then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found the ransom, his flesh shall be fresher than the child's, he shall return to the days of his youth. What you've really got there is a picture of revival.

And that this revival might come to a man, or even come to a church, so often it needs a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man what is right for him, and where he's been wrong. This is really what you may call the prophetic ministry. There's very little of it among us.

Such people who can counsel me in the hour of my need, such people who become interpreters to me of God's ways, and help me see what God is getting at, who will love me enough to be honest with me, and love God enough to obey what he's asking me to do, they're one among a thousand. They're one among a thousand. I've seen some suffer, and I thought that I could see why.

I thought I could see what God was getting at, but I hesitated to play the part of the prophet. I hesitated to play the part of an interpreter, to show unto that brother what was right for him. I feared lest I would act the part of one of Job's comforters.

God knows he was suffering, she was suffering enough, and I possibly, as they did, might add to his or her sufferings. I really didn't feel perhaps I was called upon. I don't know whether I was right or wrong.

It needed a braver man than me, and a more loving man than I was. But what a ministry it is! When there is a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand, who will love you enough, to be honest with you, knows God enough to be able to discern his mind, and will show what is right for you. If there is such an

one, and you respond to that loving challenge, what will happen? God will be gracious to you.

He will say, deliver him from going down to the pit. I've found a ransom. The ransom of Calvary will become effectual for you, when you see wherein you've got to return.

Because the blood of Jesus has no meaning apart from sin. It's irrelevant. But when I'm at last enabled to see wherein I need to return, then the blood of Jesus is all my peace.

It's a ransom. I can be free. My flesh shall be fresher than a child's.

I shall return to the days of my youth. I shall pray unto God that he be favourable unto me. He shall see his face, and I'll give a testimony.

I'll go and sing my song to my brothers, and say I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it was not requited to me, it's been forgiven. Thus will my soul be delivered from going down to the pit, and my life shall see the light. I believe this was the work of the Old Testament prophets.

They were interpreters. History was taking place. Judgements were abroad in the land, and these men interpreted those judgements of the people.

They told them for what cause. And not many to rub it in, but to provoke them to return to the Lord. I've often thought of that story of the serpent in the wilderness.

And the people murmured against Moses. And God sent foulest serpents among the people that bit the people, so that many died. That wasn't punitive, it was restorative in its intentions.

And it worked. And the elders came to Moses and said, Moses, we've sinned. You didn't know what we've been doing, we've been talking against you, complaining against you behind the tents.

Forgive us, Moses, and pray for us. I tell you that's a wonderful thing. That's revival, when men volunteer their confession of sin, and ask forgiveness of others whom they've wronged.

But how in the world did they connect that plague of snakes with their speaking against Moses? I don't know. Except I infer that somewhere along the line there was a messenger, an interpreter. One among the thousands, and there came a man of God to them, and said, you've gotten away from God, you're complaining, therefore has he sent the plague of serpents returned to the Lord.

I don't know if there was one such. But I don't know how they saw it. Maybe God reviewed them direct.

Because there was no great connection between criticizing and being bitten by the serpents. But God interpreted to it. And so it needs to be with us.

And so it was all the way through history, in the Old Testament. Take all those judgments that the prophets were always pronouncing upon them. They were restorative in their attention.

Those messages of judgment they gave was really an offer of mercy. That's very clearly stated in Jeremiah. Because he was told to write what God had given him and pronounce it to the people, stand there where all people could hear, in spite of the fact the king hated it, go and do it, said God.

It may be that the house of Israel will hear all the evil which I have purposed to do unto them, that they may return every man from his evil, that I may forgive their iniquity of sin. Will you remember that? When

you read your Bible, when you hear the preacher, that the message of judgment is always and every time an offer of mercy. He's only talking to you about hell.

Maybe you'll hear it and you'll repent and he'll forgive you. He only talks to the Christians about what may come upon him if he goes in the way of disobedience. Not that it shall come upon him, but rather he will repent and God will not have to send him.

Oh, what a gracious God. A God of grace and truth. I thank God I've been the object of the ministry of certain messengers, interpreters.

Perhaps no one dealt more faithfully with me than my dear friend, William Negenda, now in glory. He was a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand. And he never scrupled to tell me.

Very often by repenting himself first of his wrong reaction to something I'd done or said, and then I got the light myself. In order to withdraw me from my purpose, to cut off pride from me, to save me from going down into the pit. And such ministry is not only always challenging and convicting, it's very encouraging.

I was engaged on a round-the-world tour years ago. I was going on my own. I'd left Revel behind.

And a deep misunderstanding arose between Revel and me, which we couldn't get right by letters, nor by long-distance telephone calls from India. And I was in such a state of heart that I said, it's no good, I can't go on. And I cancelled the trip round that world.

I was going to go to Chuck at Hawaii. That had to be cancelled. And I came back.

I came back, as I thought, an absolute failure. Everybody had my itinerary before them, been praying for me, and suddenly I turn up. And I went to a conference of brethren.

I said, I don't know what the world will think. And William Uganda was there. And do you know what he said to me? Praise the Lord, Roy, that you were weak enough to come back.

Oh, how encouraging. Oh, the ministry of those who are interpreters, who will show unto man what is right for him. How terrible if I said, I can't be weak enough to return.

He would praise that I was weak enough to return. May I tell another story? I don't know if, I hope Chuck will not mind me repeating something he told me only the other day. In that big church of his, which has been so greatly blessed, there was apparently a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand.

Nobody thought very much of him. But this man came to Chuck and said, there's been something I want to say to you for two years and I haven't dared. And he shared with Chuck something that he and the church had done, which as he saw it, didn't measure up.

It was a very deep thing, a hard thing to respond to. But Chuck at last felt it was right to share it with the church. It was a Sunday of Sundays.

The whole church began to respond in like repentance from all over the place. And who knows but that the faithfulness of that interpreter is going to be a new chapter for the church, is going to save that church from all sorts of pits. All this leads me to two things.

Does it mean that I ought to be willing to be that interpreter? You need to be very guided by God. But God may give you no rest. Maybe it's the last thing in the world you want to do.

If you have an itch to tell another man where he's wrong, that's the flesh. Invariably when God wants to use you as an interpreter, it's the last thing in the world you want to do. It's a death to die.

You might say, am I willing to be such-and-one in fellowship and love to another? Or again, do I need to receive that ministry? The trouble is, as far as I know, they're so rare, I have no one to help me like this. All right then, you've got someone in Jesus. Jesus bears a wonderful title in the first chapter of the book of Revelation.

He has many beautiful titles given to him in that first chapter. One of them is the faithful witness, Jesus, the faithful witness. And if you don't know wherein you've got wrong, if you don't know wherein you need to repent, you can go direct to Jesus and say, Jesus, will you be the faithful witness to me? Live up to thy name, Lord, thou messenger of God, thou interpreter, thou one among a thousand, thou who art so ready to show unto man what is right for him and where he's gone wrong.

And as I obey what he says, I shall have an experience of revival, pictured in the very words that Job gives us. And so this is the word of Elihu. Something really authentic.

Something that really does. It isn't the answer for every suffering. God hasn't got one pat answer for everything, but it is the thing that Elihu said.

And maybe this is applied very much to us. We need to see our wrong attitude. And we need to be open to any ministry he's got for us through another, or directly from God.

From Jesus. That one among a thousand who can tell the blessing that will come. What dangers we've been spared of.

What pits we should be saved from. Because we were open to God, to show the meaning of his speech to us. The meaning of those incidents.

The meaning of those troubles. The meaning of things going wrong. So, behind a frowning providence he hides a shining face.

And the end of that man is going to be peace like a river. Always. For grace reigns.

And the last end of that man who says yes is going to be peace, blessing and gladness and prosperity in the things of God. Amen.

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