

Elihu

Elihu may not be a familiar name to you but you surely remember Job. You may even remember his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. I was the fourth acquaintance to visit Job and heard everything that was said and saw everything that was done. After all had finished speaking and there was a pause, I took the courage to respond.

The three friends came to Job because of their long relationship. I came with a message, but waited, thinking, "Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom. But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right." So finally, I said, "Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know. For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst."

I was angry because of what I had heard. Job justified himself rather than God and his friends could not refute him. I was given insight, not because I am worthy, but because the LORD chose me to carry a message. Where did the problem with the dialogue lie? Job and his friends all relied on human wisdom, which simplifies the complexities of life into formulas. If something bad happens, it is because you have sinned. If you don't sin, God will shelter your life. Are these statements true? They approximate the law of cause and effect and allude to justice, but they do not account for the sovereignty of God.

Is the LORD required to justify his actions to a human being? Does a parent have to explain to an infant why his feeding was late? Can the infant even comprehend the reasons? I was given insight, far beyond my years and above my level of comprehension regarding the ways the LORD communicates. "For God does speak — now one way, now another — though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal."

Job, the three friends and I were all given a demonstration of why the LORD usually communicates in those ways. To hear directly from the LORD is an overwhelming experience. More often, messages are sent by angels or human messengers, like me. Why? Because humans have been created to freely choose, but not to be compelled. The message I was given could have been refused or ignored because, as I told Job, "I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you."

Job's friends' basic error was the arrogant assumption that they understood all causes and effects. Job's sin came in his impatience to be shown the ultimate justice of the

LORD. He did demonstrate insight when he expressed faith in the LORD's nature by saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." Then he spoiled it by continuing with, "I will surely defend my ways to his face." I was given the courage to warn Job not to imagine that God would not care if he turned to evil.

Finally, having seen that Job's heart was right, the LORD did speak. And Job got the point, saying, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

The LORD then spoke to Eliphaz, saying, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." Further the LORD said, "So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly."

Job prayed for them and the LORD restored to him double all that he had before the test. I was not mentioned at all by the LORD, neither compliment nor criticism. This was my test. The messenger need not be rewarded for doing his duty. None of us were told the reason for the episode until we entered the eternal kingdom and were shown the accusations of Satan and the confidence the LORD showed in his servant, Job.

We all face many life situations for which the back story will not be made known to us. Our lives will have to be lived in faith – not some abstract concept, but confidence in the nature of the one who made us and knows us. I was given a glimpse of redemption with the message I did not understand though I spoke as commanded. "Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him' — then his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth."

In your day, the incredible source of the ransom is known. He is the Promised One. The back story is known to you. The accuser has been cast down and condemned. There is no excuse for questioning the glorious fact that, "The LORD is full of compassion and mercy."

All of Job, especially 32-42, Ezekiel 14, James 5