

16. Gems in the midst of garbage

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Nelson Molina, a lifelong New Yorker and a sanitation worker since 1981, began collecting pictures and trinkets along his route about 20 years. When he was asked the reason for his collections, he said, "To brighten up our district sanitation locker room." Gradually, his coworkers from his and other districts started to drop off contributions from time to time. Today, he estimates he has close to 1,000 pieces in his collection, arranged with great thoughtfulness, and even humor, in an enormous open room against cream-colored brick. Molina and his coworkers consider their displays as "gems in the midst of garbage."

I am sure that you all have heard a phrase "One man's trash is another man's treasure." That's why we have garage sales in America, right? In Southern Sweden where I was born, we didn't have garage sales.

From chapter 32 to 37, we find this young man Elihu who thought that he knew everything about God and God spoke through him. Yes, he made a long-winded monologue of "Blah, blah, blah" for six chapters. We could say, "Oh, it is dumb. Ignore that young snob who was a 'know-it-all'". But if we sift all of Elihu's self-important speeches out of our way, we do find gems in the midst of garbage.

Though Elihu said some of the same things as the other speakers – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, his purpose was different from theirs. Instead of trying to prove that Job was guilty of unconfessed sin, he attempted to demonstrate that Job had a wrong view of God.

A. GOD STILL SPEAKS

Job 32:6-8 So Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said: "I am young in years, and you are very old; Therefore I was afraid, And dared not declare my opinion to you. 7 I said, 'Age should speak, And multitude of years should teach wisdom.' 8 But there is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.

Isn't Elihu brash? He started his speech with an insult. Not a smart move. He resembles a new, young Christian with just enough experience and Bible knowledge to be dangerous.

One of my three jobs is a tactical knife fighting training instructor to law enforcement officers and military personnel. During our trainings, one of my students who is a federal agent tried to put a choke hold on my neck since he is much younger, faster, and stronger which I completely agree with. One thing he didn't count on was that old age and treachery beats youth and skill every time.

Elihu was angry at three guys because they couldn't refute Job, and he was angry at Job for justifying himself rather than God.

It is easy to fly into a passion and get angry – anybody can do that. But to be angry with the right person to the right extent and at the right time and with the right object and in the right way – that is not easy, and it is not everyone who can do it.

Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath

Job 32:16-20 And I have waited, because they did not speak, Because they stood still and answered no more. 17 I also will answer my part, I too will declare my opinion. 18 For I am full of words; The spirit within me compels me. 19 Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins. 20 I will speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer.

Elihu said that he was full of words like a wineskin full of wine. As the new wine ferments, it produces gas that inflates the wineskin. And if the skin is old and dry, it will break as Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 9. If anybody had suggested that Elihu was full of gas, I am sure that he would have been offended because he thought that he was a cat's meow in God's eyes. Not even close!

Little did he know that, when God finally appeared to Job and his friends in chapter 38-41, He mentioned about the three guys, but He completely ignored Elihu and all that he said in these six chapters.

Having a teachable spirit is very important to all of us. We can learn something from everyone. When we encounter a godly person, we can learn how to be godly; from an ungodly person, we can learn what not to do.

During his speech in chapter 33, Elihu brought up three important things we must take heed:

1) God speaks through dreams and visions

Job 33:15-16 In a dream, in a vision of the night, When deep sleep falls upon men, While slumbering on their beds, 16 Then He opens the ears of men, And seals their instruction.

Can God still speak through dreams and visions even though we have His complete Word, the Bible? Yes, He can, even though some respected Bible teachers insist that He no longer does, because He is God and He can do whatever He wants. Who am I to say that He cannot? But do be careful what you think that you dreamed or saw in your vision. If your dreams and visions go against the Word of God in context, it is because you had too spicy enchiladas night before. Ignore your dreams and visions, because God will never contradict His own Word, NEVER!

2) God speaks through suffering

Job 33:17-22 In order to turn man from his deed, And conceal pride from man, 18 He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword. 19 "Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, And with strong pain in many of his bones, 20 So that his life abhors bread, And his soul succulent food. 21 His flesh wastes away from sight, And his bones stick out which once were not seen. 22 Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, And his life to the executioners.

Sometimes God sends suffering, not necessarily to punish us for our sins, but to keep us from sinning and to make us better persons.

In his tremendous book "The Problem of Pain", C.S. Lewis wrote: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

God can use pain to teach us, warn us, humble us, and bring us into submission to His will. Often, God disciplines a person to turn him from error. In addition, suffering can actually be a way to keep us from committing certain sins. It can soften our hearts and teach us to depend on Him.

3) God speaks through the ministry of a special mediating angel

Job 33:23-26 "If there is a messenger for him, A mediator, one among a thousand, To show man His uprightness, 24 Then He is gracious to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom'; 25 His flesh shall be young like a child's, He shall return to the days of his youth. 26 He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him, He shall see His face with joy, For He restores to man His righteousness.

It seems likely that this interceding angel is the Angel of the Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator who gave His life as a ransom for sinners.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time

As the Angel of the Lord, the Son of God visited the earth in Old Testament times to deliver special messages and accomplish important tasks. But Elihu saw this angel not only as a Mediator between God and men, but also as the Provider of the ransom of sinners.

A word of caution regarding angels: In light of a lot of buzz about angel stories, if you are not careful, you can go down hook-line-and-sinker to the New Ages cultic theologies.

2 Corinthians 11:14 For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

None of God's angels will ever speak against God's Word, the Bible in context. Don't believe all the angel stories that come across the internet because the majority of them are fake. Ignore them.

B. GOD GOVERNS JUSTLY WITH HIS SOVEREIGNTY

Job 34:10-15 "Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity. 11 For He repays man according to his work, And makes man to find a reward according to his way. 12 Surely God will never do wickedly, Nor will the Almighty pervert justice. 13 Who gave Him charge over the earth? Or who appointed Him over the whole world? 14 If He should set His heart on it, If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, 15 All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.

The injustice of God was one of the major themes in Job's speeches. He felt that he was being treated like a sinner, and yet God would not "come to court" and tell Job what he had done wrong.

The Book of Job magnifies the sovereignty of God. From the very first chapter, it is obvious that God is in control. Even satan is told what he can and cannot do. This young whipper snapper was right on target: God is sovereign and He can do no wrong. He is fair; He is good; He has His own divine purpose for every event that occurs in our lives. He is never shocked or surprised, nor does He lose control of His creation. Furthermore, much to our surprise, He is NOT obligated to explain Himself.

C. GOD IS MAGNIFICENT

Throughout chapters 36 and 37, Elihu talks about God's magnificence, majesty, and faithfulness to the righteous. Elihu illustrated these elements of God with His handy works in nature.

Even though he had his long-winded monologue and lack of humility, Elihu did say some good things that Job needed to hear. Elihu's use of rhetorical questions in Job 37:14-18 prepared Job for the series of questions the Lord would ask him in Job 38-41.

Unlike the three friends, Elihu assessed Job's problem accurately: Job's actions may have been right – he was not the sinner as his three friends described him to be – but Elihu's attitudes and his premises were wrong.

Job was slowly moving toward a defiant, self-righteous attitude that was not at all healthy. It was this "know-it-all" attitude that God exposed and destroyed when He appeared to Job and questioned him. In sovereign and gracious care, God decides the timing of his interventions.

D. IS YOUR GOD A BIG GOD?

A couple of Sundays ago, we learned another fact about our great God – He is unsearchable in His judgments and unfathomable His ways. And this morning we went over His sovereignty and magnificence briefly. Moreover, we know that He still speaks to His children who are born-again Christians.

Let me ask you, ladies and gentlemen, how does that knowledge apply to your faith in the Lord? Is your God a big enough God to remove all of your worries? I sure hope so.

But when your minds conceive of God as "too small" to handle your problems, guess what, your problems become beyond what your small God can handle. In result, you retreat in fear and insecurity.

Are you constantly retreating to your spiritual corner because you are so afraid what might happen? Do you know why it happens to you often and you worry all the time?

When you came into the sanctuary this morning, you saw a little piece of paper on your chair that says "Your problems." Now, I want all of you to lift it up and put it right in front of your eyes where you can touch your nose with the paper. Please keep it there until I ask you to take it off. Without taking off that paper, can you read what it says on the screen? No, you cannot. Because YOU put "Your problems" before your eyes and it blocks your view. Now take it off and read what it says on the screen.

When we recognize the "bigness" of our God, our problems seem so insignificant. We gain a correct perspective on our lives. We choose to stand in awe and worship Him.

Here is a couple of questions for you to ask yourself:

- How big is my God?
- Do I put my problems before my spiritual eyes so that I cannot see Him?

Folks, we serve a merciful God who forgives all of our sins; a gracious God who extends His grace to the undeserved ones like us; an unlimited God who can provide all our needs according to His riches in glory; a powerful God who protect us from the evil ones. Give your problems to Him, because He is a big God who holds the entire universe in His hand and He can handle whatever you toss His way.

Psalm 147:5-6 Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. 6 The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.