

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 33

33.1-3. In case there was any lingering amazement in the minds of Job and his friends, Elihu desires that they would give full attention to the things that he is about to say. Paying attention, or our inability to pay attention, is the bugbear of all teaching and learning. How much more rapidly we would learn if we listened carefully. If, when we read the scriptures, we looked at each word closely, and asked the Lord to help us understand the logic, the flow and the detail we would learn more aptly. If we were “switched on” rather than “switched off” we would assimilate sooner and more accurately. However, in accordance with our human frailty, the Lord has ordained that assimilation of learning; that His method of teaching shall be, “precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little” (Isaiah 28.9-10).

“My tongue hath spoken in my mouth.” When David says (in a number of places, eg Psalm 3.4), “I cried unto the LORD with my voice” we have no difficulty with the meaning, though we could say “what else would he cry to the Lord with?” It means that his prayer was not silent but out loud. By a similar use of language this expression probably means much the same – his thoughts have been fashioned into words, distinctly audible and not muttered.

“My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart.” He does not mean that he will speak about his uprightness, but from an upright heart. Though young, he is a God-fearer but not one who understands substitutionary atonement which is the characteristic of burnt offering. If we think we have achieved a great deal in religion because we believe that there is a God, we must be cautioned by the words of James 2.19 “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” But, of course, that belief does not turn them from their wicked ways. Belief in God is not saving faith. Saving faith, such as Job possessed, is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14.1) said the Lord Jesus Christ.

33.4-5. Neither Job nor the friends would disagree for themselves or for Elihu with the statement of this verse. It is simply introduced as a basic assumption before continuing. It is noticeable that neither Job nor the friends answered him, not because they could not “set their words in order” but that, for the most part, no answer is required.

33.6. In 9.33 Job had commented, “Neither is there a daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both;” that is upon God and himself. “For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.” This, then, was Job’s wish. And this is the distinctiveness of Elihu’s speech where it does, in fact, from time to time contribute to the

debate. He claims to be the answer to Job's prayer, to be to him "in God's stead." Only Christ is the Mediator between God and man, but he is not claiming that. He is claiming to be, as Paul writes of himself and all preachers of the gospel and true pastors, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5.20). But without the gospel of Christ as Mediator a man cannot be an ambassador for God. This Elihu does not have, whereas Job does. Elihu has thus constituted himself to this office. What he says about the office, later in the chapter, is the best part of his speech and is true, but he himself is not appointed by God to be such, for he does not have the qualifications of gospel knowledge to be such.

"I also am formed out of the clay." It is indeed a ministry for men not angels, and it is a comfort to believers when a pastor speaks to them compassionately out of frailty with the knowledge of how the gospel made him a new creature.

33.7-11. In this section Elihu is declaring his fittedness to minister to Job's stated requests on behalf of God. He is a man, so Job has nothing to fear from him. His words in later chapters may well have added to Job's misery (34.36-37) and deny his claim that his hand would not be heavy upon him.

What Elihu says is his summary of what he understood Job to have been saying. It is accurate in its way. For example, Job actually used the words (13.27), "thou putttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths." But Job has never said in so many words, "I am clean without transgression." This is Elihu's perception of the force of Job's argument, for example, in 10.7; 13.23; 23.10-12. It is a perception only, because Elihu has not understood Job's perspective as a sinner saved by grace, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

33.12 Job would not disagree that God is greater than man. His argument is that His very greatness presupposes responsibility and that, if it pleased Him and only if it pleased Him, He could declare to Job the righteousness of His judgment while admitting Job's standing in Christ. Which, of course, by describing him as "perfect" to Satan, God has already done, though Job does not know it.

33.13. In this Elihu is wrong. God cannot be called to account; but He does explain Himself if and when it pleases Him. All blood-bought sinners saved by grace know what the Lord Jesus afterwards declared, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15.15). To Abraham God had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Genesis 18.17). What He reveals, and what He does not, is entirely of His free and sovereign grace, but the fact of his revealing is undeniable to his chosen saints.

33.14-22. David in Psalm 62.11, many years later, said "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth to God." Repetition is for emphasis and also to make sure that his servants have grasped and thoroughly understood His meaning. David may mean that he had known two experiences of this in his life at separate intervals; or that it had twice been revealed to him in a prophetic way. Repeated dreams underscored the same message, for God did indeed speak by dreams before the scriptures were complete, as, for example, with Joseph (Genesis 28.12); Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2.1,3) and also Daniel himself (Daniel 7.1).

Such instruction would not be forgotten as a dream flies “at the opening day”, but in these revelatory dreams the instruction would seem especially memorable. What his active brain would not receive, the terrors of a dream might serve to withdraw a man from the folly of his ways. The Lord also speaks by the pain that lays a person low, which, of course, was true of Job. If it happens that a person draws near to God and God to him through pain, even excruciating pain, and through being confined to bed even for the final time, that is a most wonderful thing and not to be denied, but the ministry will be by the word of God revealed in the scriptures for the most part. It cannot be denied that in exceptional instances God warms the heart of the sick and terminally ill unbidden.

33.23. “One among a thousand.” This, to verse 30, is Elihu’s finest passage. It is a wonderful description of the pastoral ministry. One among a thousand is not rare, for there are many thousands of peoples on earth. But neither is one among a thousand that common, for there are communities of less than one thousand. Not everybody knows a thousand others, or even has access to a thousand. If we have been to a large school, say through years 7 to 13, we may be vaguely acquainted with that number or more. To be one among a thousand is an immense privilege for the one so called. For an individual believer to be ministered to, in the way here described, by such a one will have life-changing consequences.

First and foremost the preacher of the gospel, the pastor, is a messenger. Without the gospel he is no pastor. The Greek word for messenger, letter by letter into English, is “angel.” This explains in Revelation chapters 1 & 2 the expression, “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write...” (for example, Revelation 2.1). It is of the essence of a messenger’s responsibility that he carries and delivers the message exactly. Like a schoolchild sent with a message to a teacher teaching another class in another room, he enters unbidden and says, “Mr So-and-so asks me to tell you...” and that makes interrupting the teacher in his class perfectly all right. The messenger must be loyal to his master and deliver the message faithfully. An ambassador is, in that respect, similar. While discharging his office he is not entitled to expound his own views; he may only say “I am instructed by my government to say...”

33.24. Now it is a gracious act upon the part of our Father in heaven to send to the sick bed, or the dying bed, or to those who need wisdom and guidance in the prime of life, or to children that they may learn the first principles of faith such a pastor. The opening theme of such an one is “to show unto man his uprightness.” Man has none by nature. By nature he is on the way to the pit of destruction. The multitudes are by nature going pell mell down the broad way which leads to destruction (Matthew 7.13). But what he must say, the essence of the pastor’s message, whatever else he says, is that our heavenly Father has “found a ransom.” That ransom is His dear, only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by His death upon the cross has paid a ransom for the souls of His people. He, being Himself without sin, has paid the debt we incurred to God through sin. He has made an atonement for sin by His blood. It is a substitutionary atonement; that is, we deserve to die “because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23). All humankind must perish. “Dust thou art...” (Genesis 3.19) but He has taken our place, He has stood in for His people. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3.16).

“I have found a ransom.” Long before the earth was formed, when the Father, Son and Holy Spirit lived alone as one united family it was agreed in the counsels of the Trinity that the Second Person would take upon Himself the nature of man without sin, become known as the Lord Jesus Christ, and restore as the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15.45) all that mankind lost in the fall of Adam originally. There are two representatives of the human race, Adam and Christ, and we are either in one or the Other. “Found” does not mean “happened accidentally to discover.” It speaks rather of something so foundational that it is basic to the formation of the eternal kingdom and its citizens, for all who enter must come by Christ. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” He said (John 14.6).

God’s graciousness is revealed by sending this kind of a messenger, and in so doing sends grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4.16). In English, graciousness is not much different from meaning “charming,” “courteous.” But here is a very early usage of the word in its technical, theological sense. In theology “grace” means “undeserved, unmerited love” freely, that is abundantly, bestowed by the King of Kings in the sovereign, unconstrained exercise of His own will, that is also freely, in its other sense.

33.25. In wonderful picture language this verse describes the new birth. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5.17-21).

This last expression, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” allows us to consider that in 33.23 it may be God’s uprightness that is under consideration in the words “to show unto man his (that is, God’s) uprightness.”

“His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s.” The margin reads, “His flesh shall be fresher than childhood.” The new life in Christ is better than everything there has ever been before by nature. On the same subject and with wonderful picture language the Lord graciously says, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten” (Joel 2.25). Locusts strip everything and leave everything ravaged. That is how our lives have often been. But with the revelation of the Saviour, perhaps by the pastoral ministry, our lives may be restored better than anything they ever were before. “He shall return to the days of his youth,” where “youth” means the days of his prime, not teenage years. And better.

33.26. How wonderful now to be able to pray. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5.16).

“He shall see his face with joy.” The remainder of this verse can be interpreted both ways legitimately. The believer will one day see the Lord face to face, and in the meantime by faith will see Him. It will give him great joy to know that righteousness which is in Christ. On the other hand it is the Lord who renders unto man his righteousness (that is, He imparts His

righteousness in Christ to the believer) and it is He (the Father) who sees the believer's face with joy. Of the Saviour, it is written (Isaiah 53.11), "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The verse continues, "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities."

33.27. A pastor declares the full gospel, including repentance. "If any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." That is a description of repentance. Without using the word, the dying thief upon the cross repented when he said in the presence of the Saviour to his fellow thief and then addressed the Saviour personally, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.40-43).

33.28. Deliverance from the pit, that is from hell and eternal damnation, is what is in mind here. When the time of death approaches, we are on the brink of eternity to be spent in everlasting torments (Luke 16.23) or joy (Matthew 25.21,23). A believer knows that he is turned "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26.18). It is such a marvellous gospel to administer such far-reaching consequences for good! The believer sees the light of truth now; and in heaven, where there is no night, the Lord is the light (Revelation 22.5).

33.29-30. In this exalted and extended passage we have here brought additionally to our attention the frequency with which the Saviour saves souls and draws men and women, boys and girls into His kingdom. It is "oftentimes." "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5.17). "No man can come to me, (said the Saviour), except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day...they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6.44-45;37).

For emphasis verse 30 virtually repeats verse 28. This is such an important part of the gospel message committed to the messenger. The eternal consequences of belief, for unbelief is not mentioned here, must be spelled out. It is the ministry of God Himself to create faith in His dear Son. Such a renewed life begins on earth for the remainder of earthly life and continues into heaven for eternity.

33.31-32. For all that Elihu invites Job to respond and to listen further, he never reaches these heights again. It would have been better to have ended there. Many sermons go on too long and the inspiring point is diminished by the words which follow. Yet they are recorded for our consideration and that we may learn thereby. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15.4).