

June 17, 2007

Claiming As A Message From God Something God Wouldn't Say
 Jeremiah 23:25-32 / I Corinthians 12:1-3 / Job 36:1-21

Four weeks ago when I introduced you to Elihu (who didn't appear on the scene until chapter 32) I said that one of his flaws was that he was "enormously conceited." And today's passage bears that out so clearly! Because here in verse 4, speaking of himself, Elihu says to Job: "*Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you.*" It's hard to get much more conceited than that!

As Norman Habel points out in his Commentary on the Book of Job:

"The presumptuous...tone of Elihu is reflected at several points... In 36:4 [Elihu] claims to be one "perfect in reasoning" (temim de'ot), a perfect mind whose arguments are flawless.... Elihu, it appears, claims to have the understanding of [God]...and therefore claims to speak for him."

 It's no wonder, then, that whereas Job responds in turn to each of his other three friends, he never does respond to Elihu.

And when you think about it why would he? If someone thinks they know as much as God, you wouldn't be able get them to admit their grasp of the subject might be lacking, or mistaken, or wrong, because someone who knew as much as God couldn't be wrong! They'd never lack insight; never have a wrong slant on things, and never fail to fully comprehend everything about everything!

I mean its one thing to claim you have a message from God. That happens frequently in Scripture. It's another thing altogether to claim you know as much as God! ☺ To the best of my knowledge no other person in the Bible makes such an outrageous claim!

There'd be no reason to say anything, which is probably why Job doesn't! Because he's well aware that you can't win an argument — you can't even disagree — with a person who thinks they know as much as God!

I've had similar experiences in my 20 + years as a pastor. Someone will tell me they believe a certain thing is going to happen, or they think a certain passage of Scripture means a certain thing (contrary to both the context, good doctrine, and common sense). And when you ask them why they think it means that, they will say, "Because God told me."

I mean what can you do in that situation? NORMALLY I would ask them to compare the best versions of the Bible say, or look at the Greek text, or go to different commentaries, or study the larger context or the historical background.

But when a person says they believe it because, "God told them that's what it means," it's hard to have any further discussion, or change their mind, regardless of what good, common sense, prayer saturated wisdom or interpretive methods you use!

They're so convinced "God told them so," they will not settle for any suggestions or corrections from any "lesser beings!" Such pronouncements are what I call "conversation killers." That's what they're meant to do — end all discussion and silence all disagreement, because you can't argue with God!

I was even telling Randy this week, about the man who walked up to the front of the church sanctuary in Westport, MA, just as I was about to end with the service with a benediction, and there in front of everyone proceeded to read a prophecy against me!

He was a first time visitor (though his wife had attended 3-4 times), was about six foot 7 or 8, big beard, and a balding head. And as I was finishing my sermon (ironically on judging one another) he got up from his pew, walked strait down the right side aisle (we had two side aisles), stood right in front of me about 4 feet away, and said, "Do you believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit." To which I responded that I did.

And then, having been given the "green light" so to speak, he proceeded to say:

"Then I have a word for you from the Lord." – "Thus saith the Lord: I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of all creation, the God who has no beginning and no end. My name is Yeshua. I AM come this day because I have something against you..."

Then he proceeded to tell me I was a learned man, but my learning had not come from Him (speaking as God, of course), but had come from men and their books. / That I taught doctrine and not obedience. / That I did not teach His sheep to listen to His voice, but to follow me. / That I preached for the money (at which point I almost laughed since at the time poverty level was \$16,000/yr and I was making \$9600 a year with one kid and one on the way! I could have made more flipping burgers at McDonalds)! Then he went on to say that I should give up my "secure income" and essentially repent for all those sins.

Anyway the man read the entire 2 ½ pages in front of the whole congregation who sat there tensely wondering what would happen next, until finally he simply finished, and I thanked him, told him I would pray about it, and do what Paul advises in I Thess. 5:19-20 where he says: *“Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything carefully. Hold on to what is good. Avoid what is evil.”*

So, what do you do when someone says something, claims it is from God, but you just know (from your knowledge of Scripture, good doctrine and common sense) that it just isn't so? / What do you do when someone claims as a message from God, something GOD WOULDN'T SAY?

Well, **FIRST** you would hopefully do what Paul tells us to do in I Thessalonians 5:19-20: You do not despise prophecies or words from God through others, but test what they say by Scripture, hold on to what is true, and throw out that which is false.

That's what I did with the 2½ page prophecy that man gave me (and I still have). I gave a copy to each of the leaders in the church, asked them to pray, and see if they felt there was any truth in anything the man said, took to heart the parts I felt were partially valid, and dismissed the parts the other church leaders and myself felt were just plain off base or not true — that is, the things that were just simply his opinions taken and placed into the mouth of God by prefacing them with the words, “Thus saith the Lord.”

(Actually his wife had come to me weeks earlier because in their church the pastor taught that if a wife was with her husband he was her “covering” both in church and out around town. And if she wanted to say something she had to ask her husbands permission to even talk — which she felt wasn't right, but he did! I told her I thought it was unscriptural and bordered on being abusive.)

But despite wrong beliefs I did take his prophecy to heart, for as my dad used to say: “There's usually a grain of truth in every criticism.” Or as others say of truths that sometimes hurt: “If the shoe fits wear it.”

It's just another way of saying, “Don't simply dismiss every criticism as entirely invalid. 75% of it may indeed be exaggerated or even totally off base, but the other 25% may be right on (“the shoe may fit,” so to speak) and you'd miss the constructive benefit of that 25 if you simply tossed out the whole thing because part of it was wrong.”

The same can be said of Elihu's words in today's passage. One might be tempted, after reading verse 4, to think Elihu is so enormously conceited (he's such a megalomaniac!) that anything he says from that point on will be as off base as that statement.

But that's not necessarily so. He is right when he says in verse 5, "God is mighty, but does not despise men; He is mighty and firm in His purpose." Verse 6, of course, is questionable, depending on exactly what he means by it, and verse 7 is right on the mark.

But when he gets to verses 8-12 anyone who knows their Bible has to disagree, because he speaks in an unqualified way about something God would qualify. He says (and remember he's already stated that his reasoning is perfect and thus equal to God's):

"But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, He tells them what they have done — that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve Him they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge."

And obviously his words are directed, in a pointed way, at Job whom he suggests has "sinned arrogantly" since he is indeed bound in the chains, or held fast by the cords of affliction — that is, an affliction that just won't go away.

Now it is true that sometimes that may indeed be so — sometimes people are held fast in the cords of affliction because they have sinned arrogantly and they won't be released from it until they repent and obey. Scripture gives us many such examples. But it's not true in Job's case, nor is it true in the cases of many other millions of people who have suffered in the bonds of affliction for lengthy periods of time down through the ages.

Jesus was once asked of a man born blind: *"Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"* And what was His clear response? *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus (that is, in any way that would bring such an affliction upon him). But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."*

He was born blind, Jesus implies, that God might be glorified in his healing, since everyone knew he had been blind from birth. It's kind of amazing when you think about it. That man's calling in life, according to Jesus; the purpose for his enduring those many years of blindness, was all for that one little moment when the healing of His blindness by Jesus would bring glory to God.

But that example, along with the example of Job (and we could list many others) is sufficient to show that Elihu is NOT perfect in knowledge, nor in his assumptions, nor in his reasoning. For you cannot categorically say that all long-term physical afflictions are because a person has "sinned arrogantly," or "sinned big time!"

It's just not true! Job hadn't. The man born blind hadn't. Nor had his parents who also had to endure the trials of raising a blind son. Anyone who was "perfect in know-ledge" would know that! You just can't make such generalized, blanket statements, without some type of qualifier. Scripture itself just doesn't allow it!

Sometimes it may be true, and sometimes it is not. That would be a wiser and more correct way of putting it.

But that's how one tests to see if something is of God — if it's from God it won't contradict other things God has said, because God doesn't contradict Himself!

For instance, in John 14:7, Jesus says: "I am the way, and the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me." And again in Acts 4:12 Peter speaks of Jesus and says essentially the same thing: "Salvation" he says, "is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved."

So if someone were to stand up in church and say: "Thus saith the Lord: All roads lead to God." or "All paths lead to heaven." What could you say? You'd have to say that that wasn't God speaking, because God wouldn't say something that clearly contradicts what He's already said elsewhere.

Paul shows us that in our reading from I Corinthians 12:1-3. There Paul says, "I tell you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

Paul was apparently told by someone in the church in Corinth, that a person stood up at one of the worship services, claimed to be speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or giving a prophetic utterance, and then proceeded to say that Jesus was cursed!

And Paul unequivocally tells them that no one speaking under the influences of the Holy Spirit would EVER say, "Jesus is cursed!" Someone speaking under the influences of the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us, would say "Jesus is Lord." In fact, he says, A person cannot say "Jesus is Lord," (and mean it) "except by the Holy Spirit."

The Apostle John tells us the same thing when he says in [1 John 4:1-3](#):

“Do not believe every spirit, but test the Spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is in the world.”

In John’s church there were apparently people influenced by Gnostic teachings, and the Gnostics taught that Jesus didn’t have a flesh and blood body. He only looked like He did. In actuality, they would say, He was merely a ghostlike phantom or apparition, whom you could stick your hand right through!

(In fact, that’s probably what influenced the man in Corinth also — since Gnostics believed the body was bad, for Jesus to have one would have been seen as somewhat of a curse. Gnostics sought to be freed from the body, not come and take one on!)

I even had a person influenced by such thought in my church in Honduras. Speaking of Jesus miracles he once said, *“Of course Jesus could walk on water, He didn’t weigh anything!”* In other words, He was a ghostlike figure.

But that’s precisely the idea the Gospels go to great lengths to oppose! Jesus Himself seeks to eradicate that false notion after His resurrection when He says to His disciples: “Look at my hands and my feet. Touch me and see—a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” He even goes on to eat a piece of broiled fish to prove it to them!

So, what do you say to someone who claims to be speaking for God and yet says “Jesus didn’t have a flesh and blood body”? I guess it depends: If you want to be nice, you can say, “Let’s flip over to [Luke 24:39-43](#), I want to show you something.”

And if you don’t want to be so nice, you can take them to [1 John 4:1-3](#) and tell them their mind is captive to the spirit of antichrist! 😊

Then **SECOND**, it should also be a warning for us personally as well. I’m one who does believe God still speaks to people today — not in a doctrinal sense, but to give people guidance in daily life situations — especially difficult life situations (words of wisdom, and knowledge, dreams and visions, even prophecy and tongues). Yet let me say with as much force as I can that **NEVER** does God guide us to do that which is contrary to His moral law, or the Gospel, or an explicitly stated fact of Scripture.

I once had a lady (a married lady) ask me to pray for a romantic relationship she was having through letters with an inmate in prison who wasn't her husband! And when I said I could not do so she told me I didn't understand. "God had told her it was ok." Sorry folks, a spirit may have told her it was ok, but it wasn't the Spirit of God!

I also got into a very heated discussion with one particular man (who fancied himself a prophet and expert on the end times) who came to Honduras and asked to speak in my church. He generated much spiritual excitement among many people by telling them God had revealed to him the exact day Jesus would return (Sept. 28, 1996 I believe was what he said) as well as exactly who the Antichrist was (Prince Charles)!

I refused to let him speak, and as a result was accused of being "unspiritual." I even took a lot of heat from certain individuals in my church for "quenching the Spirit of excitement" he was generating by his video's and teachings. But I told him then, and I'll continue to tell anyone else, "It is impossible for any human being to know that day." Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, "No man knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father." So unless a person is God (or Elihu who claims to know as much as God!) he can't know! Yet he stubbornly persisted, right up until the day he had predicted (and even then I'm sure he tried to recalculate another date the day after his first prediction fell through).

The biblically informed person need not get caught up in falsehood and such hype, for God does not go back on His word! It may generate intense spiritual interest for a time, but when it fails to come true it creates doubts and leaves spiritual wounds that are hard to heal.

So hear me well: God is NOT going to tell someone something He says no one can know — not even Jesus!

Then **LAST**, the ability to discern the voice of God (what He would or would not say or lead one to do) only comes as we become earnest students of the Bible! The ability to sift through all the voices that are calling out for our recognition and acceptance (and some with great spiritual fervor and intensity) comes as we learn from Scripture the things God would and would not do, or would and would not say.

Some are of the opinion that it's only a sure sign of the work of the Holy Spirit if it's out of the ordinary. They feel, "If it's not odd it can't be God." So for a while it was holy laughter, then it was people crowing like roosters and then barking like dogs, and then it was gold fillings in teeth (in which case I always wondered why God didn't just heal their teeth)!

Others, as in Jeremiah's day, preach "Peace, peace when there is no peace." Still others preach a stern and austere God who seems to hate everyone, while still others preach a God of love who is so inclusive that He accepts whatever path anyone chooses to follow—even if it excludes Him!

And still others are telling us we must reinvent the church, disassociate ourselves from its history, make worship fun and entertaining (as if worship is supposed to be a show); ditch the old hymns and replace sermons with skits or video clips. Some are even saying: Stop preaching the gospel, and simply do the gospel! Don't preach reconciliation, do reconciliation. Don't preach atonement, do atonement.

So which voice does one listen to? Who is speaking for God? And since they conflict, which one is right and which one is wrong?

Let me leave you with this thought: Often times it is not easy to tell. It's not. You must do what I've already said and sift through all that you hear and read. Even in the same book, or in articles written by the same author, some ideas are very good and wise, and others aren't worth the paper they're printed on. But one thing we can be sure of — if we evaluate everything being said in light of the Word that God has already spoken to us in the Scriptures contained in this Book, we will be not only stand on safer ground, we will be more effective witnesses, wiser counselors, and more mature Christians.

There are few times in history when knowing your Bible has been so important. I mean it's always been important, but these are confusing times that demand we know it well and gain the discernment it produces.

As Paul says in II Timothy 3:15: "Evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture (come on you know it!) All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The only way to know who is speaking for God, is to know the way He speaks! And we learn that from the Bible. Listen to it and you will become familiar with God's voice; wise and discerning and thus be able to sift through all the other voices competing for your attention and compliance.