

# Questioning God Through Hardship

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 August 2021

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thank you so much, everyone who's participated in the service so far. Thank you so much, Charles, for leading us in prayer. And it's wonderful to see you this morning, folks, particularly maybe this is your first time or you're visiting Edinburgh.

We're just so delighted that you've taken this Sunday to join us. And we just hope that you're blessed during your time with us. Come with me to Job 32. We're going to try and take in the breadth of these six chapters today.

Some wonderful truths that God has for us in his word. But as you're turning there, let me tell you about a conversation I had recently. Our car was faulting a bit. So I was trading it in this time last year.

And I'm talking to the car salesman, getting to know him a little bit. We're talking about our families. We're talking about life. The stuff had just opened up. It was last summer again.

We're talking about everything that's been going on. And we're talking a little bit about our jobs. And he's asking me about my job. And I'm telling him about what I do. Leads to some great conversations.

[ 0 : 58 ] He's listening to me tell him what I do for a job. I'm a pastor. I'm a minister of a local church. So I ping the question back at him. And I say, well, mate, how long have you been selling cars?

How long have you been doing this? And he starts telling me how long he's been doing it. And then he starts telling me about his former life when he used to be in the army. And he used to spend a bit of time in the 90s in Northern Ireland during the riots.

So he starts telling me about everything, having learned what I did for a job. He starts telling me about everything that he went through. And if I remember the conversation rightly, he says something to me along the lines of, listen, son, when you've been through what I've been through, when you've seen the things that I've seen, do you know what?

I used to believe in that God stuff. But having been through everything that I've been through, seen everything I've seen, how on earth could a good God allow all of that to happen?

So three things go through my mind. First of all, guys, we need to take really seriously reaching people with the goodness of Jesus, who from their own admission will never darken the door of our church.

[ 2 : 07 ] How can we reach people in our city with the goodness of Jesus? They ain't going to come to us. We need to go to them. Okay, thought number two, there's some really painful stories that people have in life.

Some big questions about everything that goes on. Some of you will be sitting here today with your own stories and your own scars about things that have happened in your own life.

Okay, we're not to duck them. We have to listen and walk with people through their pain. And thought number three, as I listened to him, it occurred to me once again, that how often is it true, friends, that when suffering comes, we go through painful times, whether it happens to ourselves, whether it happens to other people that we know and love, it can cause us to ask some really big questions and begin to doubt the very character of the gods who we claim to know.

Yeah? So things like in our minds, does God really love us? Is God really there?

Is God really fair? Can this God really be trusted? Is God really in control? And if the answer to those questions you think is yes, then how do you know that?

[ 3 : 32 ] Have you ever asked those sorts of questions in your life? I take it we all do in the life of faith, as we go through life. Who is this God? Well, see, as we tap into Job this morning, here's what I reckon is going on in his mind.

Okay, if you're joining us this morning, we've been in this book for a number of weeks now, and we've journeyed with Job and his friends. Here's what I reckon is going on. Because of everything that Job has suffered, compounded with the absolute drivel, which his friends have offered him as an explanation as to why those things have happened.

I wonder whether Job started to believe things about God and question his very character and wonder why the things are happening to him the way they're happening.

Okay? Now, let me just say, that has been the aim of the devil ever since Genesis 3. Did God really say? Which, if you can dig beneath the surface of that question, underneath it is the subtext, sub-question, can God really be trusted, right?

What is he hiding? How can you know God's heart? Did God really say? It's been the serpent's light ever since the beginning. And I reckon, having spent a lot of time in these chapters this week, I wonder whether those thoughts are in Job's mind.

[ 4 : 53 ] And so, enter stage left. I don't even know whether it's stage left or stage right, but we're going to stage left, right? Enter stage left in this drama, this man called Elihu. Now, come with me to chapter 32.

This is where we meet him. This man called Elihu. Now, just notice the details at the beginning of chapter 32 as we get to know him a little bit. He's a young guy, okay, who I think we're meant to understand.

He's been there with Job and his three friends this entire time. He's been there, right? So, he's seen Job's suffering. And he's heard the three friends offer their unsympathetic and untrue claims as to why this is happening to Job.

So, he's heard all of this. And he's heard Job give his defense in which he's continually pleaded his innocence before them and before God. Okay?

So, Elihu's heard all of this. He's seen all of this. And now he speaks uninterrupted for six chapters. And here's my take on him.

[ 6 : 02 ] And people do see this differently, but here's my take on him. I think he's coming on the scene here in the drama playing an almost prophetic role in the story.

So, he's bringing truth about who God is to Job's attention and into Job's situation. Now, let me just give you a few things in the text that might suggest that because I think it's important that we kind of wrestle with what is this character doing in the story.

In the context, it's really interesting because not only does Job not respond to Elihu's words like he's done his other friends, but the very next thing in the story that happens once Elihu is finished, end of chapter 37, as we enter chapter 38, the very next thing that happens is God speaks.

God speaks. Which, as a side, is that not a wonderful testimony to the patience of God? Because God could have rightly broken in at chapter 3, couldn't he?

And answered Job and his three friends. Could have broken in at that point. But no, God waits.

Graciously, patiently, seeing and hearing everything that's going on before giving his response.

[ 7 : 22 ] You know, we had some friends around recently who were reflecting on that. We're 36, they're around our age as well. We're reflecting back on the things we used to do in our 20s and the things we used to think and say.

How patient is God with us? We reflected. As we think back on that, how patient is God with us?

And do you know what? We'll be saying exactly the same thing in 10 years' time.

How patient is this God? It's interesting when God speaks, he corrects Job. You see that next week and onwards.

He corrects Job, and he certainly corrects the three friends, gives them a stinging rebuke. But he's nothing to say to Elihu. Nothing to say to Elihu, which again, I think, might add another weight to the understanding that he's playing an almost prophetic role here.

Now, two things I want us to see before we get into what Elihu says. I want us to see two things about how he goes about his job. Okay? Now, firstly, notice that Elihu's desire is a godly one.

[ 8 : 29 ] Okay? Four times in the first five verses of chapter 32, we're told that there were what? Look for the word. What's the word? He's angry. Okay?

See it? He's angry. Now, we immediately can read that in light of everything that's come, and we conclude that this guy's a bit of a hothead. Okay? Youth, arrogance, we put it together in light of everything that's come before, and we think that's the case.

But look at verse two. Why is he angry? He's angry because he's been listening to Job and his friends say things about God which just aren't true.

So Elihu has a fire in his belly that this God is represented and understood rightly. His desire is a godly one, and I think his approach is a humble one.

Look at verse six of chapter 33. Just glance at it there. Speaking to Job, he says, I am the same as you in God's sight. I too am a piece of clay.

[ 9 : 31 ] Now he views himself. He's a piece of clay. Isn't it a very humbling thing to say? Right? Weak, fragile, brittle. You ever been to doodles on the meadows there and make clay pots?

That's what it is, isn't it? You mould it. Fragile, weak, vulnerable. That's what he's saying about himself. He's not speaking to Job from his ivory tower. He's coming alongside him as a piece of clay. And verse seven, no fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy on you.

He's not come to Job seeking to add burdens to his life. He's come to help and bring truth. And I take it, did you see during the Olympics the gymnasts who were on the rings?

I love this image. What is it they do, the gymnasts? This is where you see the biceps. What do they do? They grab both rings tightly, don't they? Both rings. And friends, see when it comes to our relationships with one another, a love for God's truth and a love for God's people.

Right? We hold just one of them and let the other one go, we will fall. Okay? We need to hold both of those things when we come to loving one another. Take a leaf out of Elihu's book, Love for God's truth love for God's people.

[ 10 : 44 ] So here's what I want to do really quickly in the time that we have left. I want us to pick me to, I want to pick out four truths that Elihu brings to Job's attention about this God and then we'll try and bring it together at the end to see its central message.

Is that okay? Here we go. Okay, here's number one. Elihu's saying, Job, God's grace is deeper than you think. God's grace is deeper than you think.

Here's what I think Elihu senses as he looks at Job and as he listens to what he's saying. He senses that Job as a believer has begun to think that God is treating him like his enemy.

Now, have a look at chapter 33 and verse 9. We're going to be a lot in the text today because I want you to see where this is coming from. Okay? So verse 9 of chapter 33, Elihu's quoting Job.

Right? This is what Job is saying. I am pure. I have done no wrong. I am clean and free from sin.

Yet, God has found fault with me. He considers me his enemy.

[ 11 : 44 ] Do you see that word? His enemy. That's how God views me. And Elihu comes on the scene and says, that is simply not true. That's not true. Verse 23, in this you are not right.

God is gracious. And see where Elihu takes Job. He takes him to the very fact that Job knows him as God. Okay?

Verse 22 onward. Just see the flow. God acts to save people from the pit of their destruction. You see where he takes him? This is what this God is like.

This God acts to save people's souls from the pit. Okay? You hear Jesus in the New Testament talking about the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. He's talking about hell, isn't he?

This is what this God does. He saves people from that place. And God in his grace provides, verse 23, a mediator who will declare them right in God's sight.

[ 12 : 49 ] And because of what that mediator does, has done, the person who knows God, verse 27, because what of God has done, will sing to others, I have sinned, I have perverted what is right, but I did not get what I deserved.

That's what this God does. God has delivered me from going down to the pit, and I shall live to enjoy the light of life. This is the song of the people who know God is their redeemer.

This is what he has done for them, and they sing it to the world. They sing it to others. And that is the heart of this God, to save sinners, graciously.

So Job, never entertain the thought that as a believer, God isn't gracious. Never entertain the thought that he is your enemy. The very fact that you know him as God, as provider, as forgiver, as redeemer, is proof of the fact that his grace is deeper than you think.

It's wonderful, isn't it, when we get to the New Testament. What is, how did God show his love?

That while we were still his what, he died for us. He sent Christ for us. While we were still his enemies, we will never be an enemy in his sight if our faith is in Christ.

[ 14 : 07 ] God's grace is deeper than you think, Job. It's deeper than you think. Secondly, and we'll rattle through these, okay, God's ways are fairer than you think. Chapter 34, and I think the whole

central issue in this chapter, and you could argue it's the whole issue of the whole book.

Pick me on that afterwards if you want. The whole issue here is the justice of God. Is God right in doing what he does? And look what Job is saying, verse 5.

For Job has said, I am in the right and God has taken away my right. In spite of my right, I am counted a liar. My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression. So, Job is accusing God of being unfair.

And what is Elihu's response to that? To underscore the rightness and goodness of God in all that he does. Travel with me, okay.

Verse 10. Just see how he does this. Far be it from God that he should do wickedness. Do you see it? Verse 11. For according to their deeds he will repay them.

[15:14] Verse 12. Of a truth God will not do wickedly and the Almighty will not pervert justice. So what he's saying is that this God, there is no partiality with him. There is no evil with him.

You're not going to dig underneath the surface of God and find some impurity there. No, God is holy and his ways are always right and his ways are always good.

As the saying goes, friends, we might not always see his hand but we can trust his heart. This God is good.

He's perfectly just. We might not see it in this life but friends, one day when Christ returns, we will. It's what the Narnians always say of Aslan, isn't it? That all will be right when Aslan comes to sight. You know, the first song they sang at the Keswick Convention this year and it's just finished was the hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness. I've heard countless churches up and down the country who when it came to the first song that they were going to sing after 16 odd months of not singing went for that song.

[16:26] Great is Thy Faithfulness because they just, it's not just wonderful to be reminded in song that God never changes. Everything in our world has changed and yet this God never changes.

Great is Thy Faithfulness O God my Father there is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not thou compassions they fail not as thou hast been thou forever will be.

He's got the old English right there. He's not going to come and go like fashion. Right? He's not going to go off like a pint of milk. This God never changes. He never changes.

And His compassions will fail not. God, Job, don't think that God has changed. His ways are fairer than you think.

And thirdly, friends, His purposes are bigger than you think. God is all-wise, Job. He's all-wise. And His wisdom is just, it's just so much greater than ours.

[17:32] Right? It's not like we're in the championship and He's just one league up in the Premier League in terms of His wisdom. Right? No, if God were to explain all His ways, it would be like a parent trying to explain neuroscience to a toddler.

Right? It just, it just can't happen. It's just on a different level to us. His wisdom. Verse 5 of chapter 36, I think it's slightly better than the ESV.

Behold, God is mighty and does not despise any. He is mighty in the strength of His understanding. Verse 22, God is exalted in His power.

Who is a teacher like Him? And that is a wonderful truth about this God that somehow in His wisdom He can use even the most horrific of things for His good purposes.

Look at verse 15. He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity. Right?

[18:42] So this God, He teaches us things through the hardships that I take it, friends, you and I wouldn't have learned any other way.

and I say that sensitively because I know what people have gone through and perhaps you are going through right now. But this God for us in Christ, He molds and shapes and renews and teaches and He has committed Himself to us always as His people.

What is the promise Jesus made right at the end of the Gospels? Behold, I am with you until the end of the age. I've heard so many of you testify to me in my time here that in times of horrific pain and suffering that you can honestly look back and hand in heart say that not only did you come out the other side of a horrendous situation in your life knowing God in ways that you never thought possible before but that through your story and your pain and your experience God has used it to help others.

And honestly when I get to glory and they ask me who were some of the saints that encouraged you along the way? Friends, a number of you will be there. As I've seen you just keep on clinging to

God through your hardships.

You know, it was C.S. Lewis who famously said God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. And his famous phrase, it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

[ 20 : 31 ] God's purposes are bigger than you think, Job. And finally, God's power is greater than you think. And in Job's mind he's saying to himself verse 3 of chapter 36, he's saying to himself what's the point in trying to be good?

What's the point? What does he say? What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned? So he's saying what's the point in being good? And I think he's beginning to believe the prosperity gospel lie.

Remember that his friends have been subtly sowing all the way. And it's the inverse of what his friends have been saying. He's thinking that because I'm following God surely things should be going well for me.

But Elihu comes in the scene and he says almost that that's the wrong way of looking at things. Right? Not to worship God for his stuff. Not just to worship God when things are going well.

Worship him because of who he is. And Elihu breaks in at verse 14 and he says, I love this, hear this, O Job, stop and consider the wondrous works of God.

[ 21 : 39 ] So look up, stop what you're doing, look up and think about who God is. And as we'll see next week, there are massive echoes of what Elihu says here. Massive echoes of it in what the Lord says next chapter.

From verse 16, right? Just follow the questions. Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?

Right? Rhetorical question. Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of deepest darkness? Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?

Tell me if you know all this. Friends, don't let anyone tell you there's not sarcasm in the Bible. He's saying, isn't he, rhetorically, think about who God is. You know, we're doing that on a holiday.

Sitting with the girls on the beach just looking at the clouds. Looking at the shape of the clouds.

Right? All these different shapes doing different things. And thinking, wow, isn't that cool? But it's not exactly what Elihu's saying.

[ 22 : 38 ] Job, were you there when the skies were laid out? Consider the manifold power and wisdom of God. Who is this God?

You should look up and consider who he is. Stop. Do some of us need to do that today? To stop and consider the wondrous works of God. And just notice where Elihu leaves it right at the end of chapter 37.

What does he want for Job? It's a great question to ask as we go through all of this. What does he want? Surely he wants that Job would stop and repent of saying wrong things about God and run back to this God and know him as the gracious God that he is.

Right? Verse 24 of chapter 34. Therefore men fear him. He does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.

So what is the right response to knowing God? The answer here is fear of the Lord. Fearing him. So friends, big questions in life, right?

[ 23 : 46 ] Does God really love us? Does he really love us? Is God really fair? Can God really be trusted? Is God really in control? And the question comes, how do we know?

How do we know? Friends, we know so much more where we stand in history because of the truer and greater Elihu.

Right? The prophet, the word of God who doesn't just bring truth but who is truth. Grace and truth. You know, here's something I was thinking about in holidays. You just see the connections as you're going through the gospels reading about it.

One of my favourite things in the gospels, Mark chapter 4. Right? Tucked it at the end of Mark chapter 4. Jesus, we read it earlier, on the boat with his disciples.

Right? What is happening in that scene? The boats are getting hammered by the waves.

Something like something out of the North Sea. Remember that program Trollerman and BBC? It's how I always picture it. The boat getting hammered by the waves and you always know it's a crisis, don't you?

[ 24 : 48 ] When the professionals start to panic. It's what they always said about the credit crunch in 2008, wasn't it? When the professionals start to panic, that means the rest of us can panic. Here's hardened fishermen in the boat and they're freaking out, aren't they?

We're going to die. We're going to die. And all the while they're suffering. They're looking at Jesus and what is he doing? He's sleeping. He's sleeping. Can you just get in the boat with the disciples asking all sorts of questions about Jesus, looking at him, sleeping, thinking, does he care?

Does he know? Does he see? Does he love us? All this stuff that's come before us, he's healed people. Has he spoken to people? And yet here we are. Does he care?

All comes together in their question. What do they say? What do they say? Do you not care that we are perishing? Because at the moment it doesn't look like any of that stuff is true, does it?

Being there. Does Jesus care? Jesus wakes and he speaks three words, peace, be, still.

[ 25 : 55 ] and the waves stop and there's calm at sea. Because and to nick a line from Elihu, the one who created the vast expanses of the earth, the one who laid out the heavens, the one who laid out the skies, the one who knows the depths, through whom all things were created, is in the boat.

He's in the boat and here is the creator bringing order from chaos and what happens to the disciples as they look at Jesus? What are they filled with in their hearts?

They're no longer looking at the storm. That's not what they're scared of. Fear fills their hearts as they look at Jesus. Now I take it when we think about fear of the Lord, what does that mean?

It means I'm looking at Jesus and because I know who he is, I am taking my eyes off him no time. I am looking at him and of course marking the context it's about trusting his word.

Here is who this Jesus is. That's what it means to fear the Lord, surely. Not to run away and cower but to fix our eyes on him and trust in him to go nowhere else. I'm tying up my whole life leaning at all on who he is.

[ 27 : 16 ] So friends, does God really love us? Is God really fair? Can God really be trusted? Is God really in control? Heaven's answer to our questions is a person.

Heaven's answer to our questions is Jesus. You want to know an answer to him? Look at him. Get to know him in the Gospels. This is who he is as God unveils his heart to us as human beings.

Jesus, God in the flesh. And more importantly, heaven responds to our questions. Not just with a person but particularly with a person on a cross.

If you're ever tempted to think, friends, does God really love me? Look nowhere else but to Jesus on the cross. That's how God showed his love for us.

That while we were his enemies, Christ died for us. Consider the lengths that he went to for you. You are his child adopted into his family.

[ 28 : 18 ] Justification, I love this, someone put it recently, justification says you're right in God's courtroom. Adoption says you're welcome in his living room. This is who you are. Have you ever attempted to ask the question, do I matter to him in light of what I've done?

Does he care? Am I worth anything? Am I precious in his sight? Friends, look at the cross. He says God's yes, surely, to that question. Have you ever attempted to think, is God fair?

Look at the cross where Jesus bore all of God's righteous anger against our sin on the cross, in our place, didn't just sweep it under the carpet, pretend it didn't happen.

Jesus really did die on a cross for our real sin. Have you ever attempted to ask, is God in control? Then surely we have to look at the cross.

If ever there was a moment when it looked like God was not in control, surely it was there. Jesus despised by his own, abandoned by his friends, seemingly powerless, crucified by his enemies.

[ 29 : 26 ] And yet, is it not true when we look at that, that God used the most horrific thing imaginable to bring about the greatest good that you and I can ever know? Friends, is God powerful?

Is he in control? Look at Jesus on the cross. Paul would call the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. Friends, there are some big questions and horrible things that happen in life.

But where does this passage tell us to run? Once we close, let me just tell you a story about Corrie ten Boom. Okay, taken to the Ravensbruck camp in Germany during the Second World War along with her sister taken there to die.

And when they got there they were put in a dorm piled high with bunk beds and people. And her diary, if you read it, it goes, as soon as they got there they were just thrown upon by fleas everywhere, started just devouring their bodies.

You can imagine the smells and the sights that would make even the strongest of us here today sick. Fleas everywhere. But the fact there was fleas everywhere meant that the guards never went near their dorm.

[ 30 : 37 ] Never went near it. Don't want to go and get bitten by fleas ourselves so they never went near it. So what the ladies in that dorm used to do, every evening a number of them would gather in a circle and they would read from this little pocket Bible that Corrie had somehow managed to smuggle into their dorm.

So they'd get together in this circle and they used to read it together. And they would try and translate it into Polish and French and German so that the people from different places could understand.

And reflecting many years later do you know what she wrote in her memoirs about these little times as they opened the Bible? She said the blacker the night around us she's talking about the suffering everything that's going on the blacker the night around us the brighter and truer burned the word of God.

And the scripture that they came back to every single night was Romans 8 37 that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Every night they came back to that verse. So friends when we're asking those big questions about life why does God what's going on is he in control does he love us where are we to run we're to run to the word of the truer and greater Elihu.

[ 31 : 54 ] Right we need to cherish and respond to God's word as it's come at us this morning and fix our eyes on Jesus Christ and bask ourselves in his great love for us.

So why don't we just take a moment just as we finish this morning and everything that's come at us I realise we covered a lot of territory there this morning why don't we just be still and let's bring our prayers and our thanks as well to our creator and then I'll close us in prayer and we'll stand to close with our final song but let's just have a moment of quiet and let's just allow God by his Holy Spirit to minister amongst us this morning and so Father we thank you Lord for the precious truth that while we were your enemies Christ died for us Lord thank you Father for your commitment to us as your people that in Christ you have promised never to leave us or forsake us and you've given us your spirit to help us know that and so Father I pray for any here this morning who are struggling in any way

Father that you would be the comforter this morning so Father we just praise you for who you are today and we thank you for our time together in your precious word name we pray amen that do nothing I want to do blah so can do.

Or can maybe I do have hope to