

**2025 TALK, ALL-AGE 12.5.25, JOB 32:6-12, 17-21**

**WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...**

Don't you just love the Book of Job...? Looks like some of you are not completely convinced...! One of the things I love about this book, is that it's Elihu who gets the last word, after all we hear from Job's three friends. Elihu is clearly a lot younger than these 'three wise men'... These three are clearly respected figures in their community. But despite his young age, Elihu demonstrates more wisdom than Job's three 'comforters' combined. Elihu rightly says that it's not age that counts, but a person's spirit combining with God's Spirit which results in true wisdom. The promise of the Prophet Joel, quoted by Peter at Pentecost, reminds us that God's Spirit will fall upon young & old alike, on both women & men... (BTW, I'm very glad that we have recently been able to celebrate the appointment of Dame Sarah Mullaly as the new Archbishop of Canterbury. It is wonderful to witness the good news of Jesus 'giving birth' to the 1st female Archbishop of the Anglican Church worldwide. Truly a fruit of Pentecost...).

But let's return to the Book of Job... What does Elihu say that is any different from the three 'comforters'...? At first glance, there doesn't seem a great deal of difference, despite him railing against these older men for not proving Job wrong. He also rails against Job himself, for apparently being in league with evil-doers, by suggesting that: 'there is no profit in trying to please God'. He reacts to the fact that Job appears to justify himself, rather than justifying God. Ouch! Double ouch! Elihu is absolutely right when he says effectively: 'I don't mince my words, I don't flatter anyone'...

Elihu felt compelled to speak out, by the prompting of God's Spirit. But it's not what he says about Job or his 'friends' which is particularly powerful here. It is what Elihu says about God that stays with us. Indeed Elihu's words prepare the way for God to speak. His words echo the message God then speaks to Job. Like Abraham, Elihu proves himself to be a 'friend of God'...

Before I go on, let me remind you what true friendship looks & feels like. It is like new rain after a long, dry spell. It is like feeling the sun on your face. It is like hearing good news. It is like the tingle down the back of your spine you experience when you feel God is near. It is just like hearing the words of Jesus,

friend of sinners, our friend. Let me remind you of his words to his disciples in John 15. (**READ** John 15:12-17)... Alleluia!

The experience of Job's three 'friends' suggests one truth - which Elihu too may have overlooked. Sometimes we are too quick to verbally attack others, when actually we should instead be using our words to glorify God. Jesus calls us his friends. And he calls us His witnesses... Our job as followers of Jesus, is not to point the finger at others. We are here simply to point people to Jesus. Which is what the Alpha course does so well. More of Alpha a bit later.

Let me read to you the closing words of Elihu, before God then speaks to Job out of the storm. (**READ:** Job 37:14-24)... Alleluia ! So many wonderful pictures of the glory of God in creation. And now we have God's final masterpiece – Jesus, the I AM who laid down his life for us & all creation. Thanks be to God! We are friends with God because of Jesus! Or, if we don't yet know Jesus, you can be friends with God, because of Jesus! Today might be that day, when you reach out to God & find God reaching out to you... If you don't yet know the LORD, if you haven't yet experienced the fullness of joy in knowing God's love, I pray that you will very soon – even today. There is nothing to compare being introduced to Jesus, or to have the opportunity to introduce someone else to Jesus, well that's something else too...! The joy of the shepherd with the lost sheep. The joy of the Father seeing his lost son returning to him... Something like that team of researchers on that TV programme, 'Long lost family', who devote themselves to re-uniting family members who haven't met for many years... There's nothing quite like bringing people face-to-face with someone you thought you would never see. Likewise, there's nothing like someone coming face to face with God & being reconciled & finding peace... Alleluia !...

To finish, I simply must share a true story on the Alpha video about 'Why & how should I pray?'... It's the sad story of a Union soldier during the American Civil War. (**SHOW VIDEO**)... (STORY below) ...

We can get to meet the Father. This is possible because the Son wants to take us by the hand & introduce us to His Father. Isn't that good news for you today?. For everyone here...? For everyone in our sad & broken world?... We can know God's friendship. We each have access to our Heavenly Father, through the Son who was sent to reach out to us and save us... This is the good news of Jesus. Thanks be to God... ! Today, you too can be introduced to the

Father, thanks to Jesus. You too speak to the Father, today! Why wouldn't you? Why not? Don't think about what is stopping you. Instead think about who is calling you... Jesus wants you to be friends with God, today... Alleluia!

(This is the true story of a Union soldier in the US Civil War... He had lost both his father & brother in the fighting. And his mum needed him home, to help with taking in the harvest on their family farm. So, he decided he needed to appeal to the President himself, to give him temporary leave from the fighting...

He gets to the steps of the White House. Before he gets through the front door, he asks an official in a smart suit if he can speak with the President. This man takes one look at his dirty uniform & his lowly rank & he tells him he has no business being there. The President doesn't have the time to speak with the likes of him. He tells him to get back to fighting on the front line, where he should be... This man doesn't ask about his story & what brought him to the White House...

The soldier went away, feeling crushed & alone. He went to sit down on a nearby park bench. He had no idea what he should do... Suddenly a young boy came up to him & sat down next to him. The boy asked him why he looked so sad. The soldier told him his story. About the father & brother he had lost. About him needing to get home to help his mum with the harvest. The boy looked at him & said: 'Don't worry. Come with me'. The boy took him by the hand. He took him to the front door of the White House. And the door swung open. The two of them walked straight past officials in smart suits & generals in posh uniforms. Then the two of them walked right up to the door of the President's office. The boy went straight in, without even knocking. There around a huge table, were more generals & more officials. And in the midst of them was President Abraham Lincoln. The President turned & smiled at the boy and said: 'Hello son, what do you want?'. And the boy said: 'Dad, there's a soldier here who needs to meet you & talk to you'...).