

Lenten Meditations On Isaiah Chapter 53 Jesus Suffering In Silence.

Text: Isa 53:6-7

1) Proved That He Was The Lamb Of God

Suggested Hymns:

2) Atoned For All Our Sins Of Silence

501, 885, 57 (i), 292, 337

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 53:6-7, ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The poet Herber describes the building of God's temple in the days of Solomon in this way:

No hammers fell, no ponderous axes rung,
Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.

Scripture tells us in 1 Kings 6:7, ⁷ *And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built.* All the timbers were prefabricated, all the stones were hewn before they were brought to the building site itself. Because it was to be a place dedicated to the worship of God, silence was the highest tribute the workmen could pay.

They must have felt as did Habakkuk the prophet when he said, *“The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.”*¹

Silence is not exactly one of the virtues of our present day and age. In fact, we are probably the loudest, noisiest, and brassiest generation that has ever lived on the face of God's earth. We are that way because we are far too busy with

those things which, in the final analysis, don't really matter very much. And because of our busy-ness, we have too little time for that silence which true religion requires.

Along the Amazon River in South America there is said to be a tribe of Indians who at certain times of the year squat on the ground and refuse to move, saying that they are waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies. That seems to make good sense.

We, too, need times of quiet, of stillness, of silence, so that the soul may catch up with the body. God Himself demands that when He says, for example, ***“Be still, and know that I am God!”***² Samuel required it of tall young Saul when he came to tell him that he was to be Israel's first king, ***“But you stand [still] awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God.”***³ Eliphaz, the friend of Job, spoke of it when he told Job about his great vision of God's power and majesty, ***“There was silence; Then I heard a voice.”***⁴

Yes, that kind of silence we need very desperately today: the silence of the creature before its Creator, the silence of the penitent soul overwhelmed with its guilt and its need to get right with God, and, most of all, the silence of the believing sinner lost in wonderment and awe before that tremendous miracle of God's love on Calvary's cross, that cross where we see the Saviour Himself. Today we see Jesus Suffering in Silence. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Suffering In Silence Proved That He Was The Lamb Of God

Listen to the words of the prophet in our text, ***“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”***

There is “a time to speak.” That is what wise old Solomon said long ago, and that was true also in the life of our blessed Saviour. In fact, the silence of Jesus during His final Passion hours becomes all the more impressive when set in contrast to the many gracious words which came from His mouth in the course of His brief public ministry.

For three years He literally walked and He talked with His countrymen from one end of the Holy Land to the other. On weekdays and on the Sabbath, from morning till night, to the multitudes, to small groups, and to individuals, Jesus spoke the will of His heavenly Father, He opened the Scriptures and showed them the way of salvation. He pleaded with them, ²⁸ ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***⁵

Here, for example, is His conversation with Nicodemus, an influential member of the supreme court of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night. We read in John 3:3-6, ³ ***Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** ⁴ ***Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*** ⁵ ***Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*** ⁶ ***“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

How long that conversation went on that night, we do not know, but this we do know: whenever the Lord had a soul before Him which was seeking and searching for truth, Jesus was ready and willing to bring to that soul the Word of Life.

Or take that other occasion on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, when ***“the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God.”***⁶ So great was the number of people that Jesus finally asked Peter to get his fishing boat and thrust out a little from the land. And there, from His pulpit on the water, He taught that great crowd of people.

And so it went on. For the weak, He had a word of strength; for the sorrowing, a word of sympathy; for the penitent He had His ***“Son, be of good cheer.”*** And for the brazen hypocrites, His fiery ***“woes.”*** Truly, therefore, it could be said of Jesus, ***“No man ever spoke like this Man!”***⁷ and truly He could testify of Himself; ***“I spoke openly to the world. ... in secret I have said nothing.”***⁸

But there is also a time to keep silence, and such a time came also for the Lord Jesus. When He was oppressed, and when He was afflicted by the false

accusations of the chief priests and elders before Pontius Pilate, what did Jesus do?

He answered nothing! When the servants of the high priest and the soldiers of Pilate spit in His face, blindfolded Him, struck Him with the palms of their hands, what did He do? He did nothing; He opened not His mouth.

When Jesus was brought *“as a lamb to the slaughter,”* when He was led out along the Way of Sorrows, bearing the heavy burden of the cross, enduring the taunts of the mob; and when He was brought *“as a sheep before her shearers,”* when the Way of Sorrows ended at the Place of the Cross and they drove great nails through His hands and feet and hoisted Him to the sky, what did He do? He did nothing; He opened not His mouth! He said not a word in His own defence! He lifted not a finger to save Himself from the agony of crucifixion!

And during those long hours of Calvary itself the story is the same as we read in 1 Peter 2:23, *“when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”* And what could He have done?

Jesus proved that earlier, at the entrance to the Garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers came to arrest Him. *“Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?”⁵ They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am He.”* And as soon as He said that, they were hurled backward upon the ground.

Why, then, did Jesus not open His mouth — to speak a word either in protest or in self-defence?

There can be only one answer to the mystery of His silent suffering, and that is the answer expressed in the hymn,¹⁰

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth
The guilt of all men bearing;
'Tis laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing.
It goes its way, grows weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint,
Its spotless life to offer;

Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds, and death,
Anguish, and mockery, and saith:
All this I gladly suffer.

There is the answer; Jesus opened not His mouth, He suffered in silence, because He had come to be the Lamb of God — the willing, the patient sacrifice for the sins of all the world, for your sins and mine!

2. Jesus Suffering In Silence Atoned For All Our Sins Of Silence

Listen again to the words of the Prophet in our text, ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

One of the signs of spring in some countries is the coming forth of great flocks of sheep from their winter quarters to be shorn, and then, slowly as the winter recedes, to be taken higher and higher up in the mountain-land pastures.

With each large flock goes a shepherd, who will spend the entire summer and autumn with his flock, living all alone in his covered wagon, giving all his time to the care of the sheep as they wander from place to place. Without the shepherd to guide and lead and protect them, the flock would soon be scattered abroad, falling prey to wolves and other wild animals.

Long ago, when the world itself was yet in its springtime, the Lord God began a human flock in the lovely Garden of Eden. He, too, wanted to be their Shepherd, their only Shepherd, near and dear to them, walking and talking with them in the cool of the day.

But into that lovely scene burst that fallen angel who had rebelled against his Maker and whom the Lord had cast out of heaven into that everlasting fire prepared for him and his evil followers. His coming into God's garden tore the flock away from the great Good Shepherd, and ever since that time *"all we like sheep have gone astray,"* astray from His side, no longer caring for His love, no longer heeding His voice with gladness of heart. *"We have turned everyone to his own way,"* and that way is not the way of God. It is the way of evil.

Look at the word **"evil."** Spell "evil" backwards, and you have the word **"live."** And is that not what evil is? To do evil means to live backwards, to live

with our backs toward God, to live without God as if He did not exist, to live away from God as if we were never going to have to face Him again!

But thanks be to God for His wonderful love, even though we lived backwards, yet the Lord has laid on Him, on Jesus, the Lamb of God, the iniquity of us all. Patiently, willingly, silently He suffered on Calvary's cross so that you and I might again live forward, with our faces turned toward a Father in heaven, hoping, believing, yes, knowing that for Jesus' sake we are declared righteous, and considered pure and holy.

Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."¹¹

And since we are today talking about Jesus' silent suffering, let us think especially of the atonement which Jesus has made for our own sins of silence! Sometimes we are guilty of too much silence! This tongue of ours can be wonderfully used to serve our God and our fellow men.

When the Lord God said in the Second Commandment: ***"You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain,"*** He did not say that we should not use His name at all. On the contrary, we should use our tongues, our mouth, our lips to call upon His name in every trouble, to pray, praise, and give thanks.

When, for example, is the last time that you have really prayed? *"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,"¹²* says the hymn. Did you ever stop to think that line through? Prayer is to spiritual life what breathing is to physical life. When the body stops breathing, when there is no regular taking in of the air about us and no regular breathing out of the air within us, then we are dead. When the soul stops breathing, when there is no regular going up of prayer from our hearts, lips, and lives, then the soul is dead. Not to pray is a sin of silence!

Or think of the many wonderful chances you and I have every day of our lives to speak to others about the faith that is in us. Let us do more than just invite people to come to church. Let us tell them what we ourselves have found in the Gospel which drives us to the house of God, namely, that precious and priceless salvation which we have in the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord. There is no better use for our tongues than to speak of Jesus.

Some time ago a Hindu cut off his tongue and offered it to a heathen goddess in a temple at Jammu, Kashmir, India. As the man was rushed to a hospital, thousands of overawed people packed the temple to praise the man's devotion and love for his god.

Have we offered our tongues to the true God? He doesn't ask us to cut it off, but He does ask us to dedicate it to the grand work of witnessing for Jesus. Not to witness is a sin of silence! Too much silence on our part is, therefore, a part of the guilt which made Jesus suffer in silence on Calvary.

Perhaps more often, however, we are guilty of not enough silence. God knows how many and how manifold are the sins committed by the children of Adam with their tongues.

There are the sins against the Second Commandment: the thoughtless use and the outright misuse of God's holy name. Who can number the countless curses in the street and the innumerable false oaths in the courts? Who can number the times when people have actually asked God's damnation, either upon themselves or upon their fellow men, sometimes even upon those near and dear to them?

Or think of the sins against the Fourth Commandment: the words of disrespect and disobedience to fathers and mothers, words that wound their hearts and even shorten their lives; words that someday must and will come back to roost on the very doorsteps of those who have spoken them.

Or think of the sins against the Fifth Commandment: words of sinful anger and wrath, of threat and violence, of hatred and revenge. Or think of the sins against the Sixth Commandment: words of impurity, words of temptation, words used in dirty jokes and dirty stories.

Or think of the sins against the Eighth Commandment: words that express quick and uncharitable judgment of someone else's motives; words that misinterpret his actions, words of slander and gossip that defame his character and destroy his good name!

Oh, how many, how great, how vile are the sins of the tongue! It is just as we read in James 3:5-6, *See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.*

And are we free from these sins? You and I know the answer. When James said, *“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so,”*¹³ he was not writing to pagan people; no, he was admonishing Christian people; yes, He is admonishing also you and me! We, too, are guilty: guilty of not enough silence!

For these sins, too, Jesus had to suffer and die! Sometimes, I’m afraid, Calvary is too far away from us in our thinking. We hear the story once more, and we are apt to think: Those chief priests and elders of the Jewish nation, they brought about Jesus’ death. They were the ones who shouted and cried, *“We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.”*¹⁴ All of that was slander and false accusation; their words did actually bring about His condemnation; but was it only their words which crucified Him?

Or another handy person to put the blame upon is Pontius Pilate. He, after all, was in authority; he could have swept away the rabble that cried for His death. Instead *“he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”*¹⁵ And with that word, *You see to it*, he gave them permission, the authority of his word; and so it was Pilate’s word, too, which crucified Him.

But again I ask: Was it only his word that nailed Jesus to the tree? Again, I am sure that we know the answer. Behind the hate-filled words of the chief priests and elders, behind the desperate word of the governor who feared the mob, behind them all are the numberless thousands and millions of words which the human race has spoken, your words and my words. Our sins of too much silence, our sins of not enough silence — these, too, made Jesus suffer and die!

And so, from the prophet’s picture of the Saviour suffering in silence, let us take home with us these two great truths. Firstly, Jesus opened not His mouth because He was the Lamb of God going to the slaughter, and secondly, Jesus opened not His mouth so that He might atone for all our sins of silence. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hab. 2:20

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- 2 Psalm 46:10
 - 3 1 Sam. 9:27
 - 4 Job 4:16
 - 5 Matthew 11:28
 - 6 Luke 5:1
 - 7 John 7:46
 - 8 John 18:20
 - 9 John 18:4-5
 - 10 Hymn 57
 - 11 Isaiah 1:18
 - 12 Hymn 424
 - 13 James 3:10
 - 14 Luke 23:2
 - 15 Matt. 27:24