



Took the Blame, Bore the Wrath

The Power of the Cross #3 – Good Friday Service

Isaiah 53:7-9

David Sunday

March 29, 2013

In Isaiah 53, God's Word speaks in detail about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God's Son over 700 years before He was born. In verses 7-9 of that great chapter we read:

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

Imagine what it would be like to hear a knock on your door at 4:00 on a Thursday afternoon. It's a beautiful spring day, and all the neighbors are outside. As you open the door, you see police officers. They tell you, "You're under arrest for the murder of a St. Charles woman." They handcuff you and put you in the back of the police car as neighbors stare aghast. That evening on the news, your mug shot, along with the pictures of you being arrested, are broadcast with all the details of the horrible crimes with which you've been accused. I can hardly imagine a more devastating scenario than to be publicly charged and accused of a crime you did not commit. To have your reputation sullied, your freedom taken away, and your loved ones traumatized by the uncertainty and agony of a brutal, prolonged trial.

Many of us have experienced this on a smaller scale. We know what it feels like to be blamed for something that we did not do—to be misunderstood, judged and maligned. Our initial impulse in those situations is to defend ourselves and set the record straight. We have a fundamental right in our justice system to be represented by a legal advocate, who will come to our defense whenever an accusation is brought against us. The first thing we look for when we are accused of wrongdoing is how can I get the best possible defense? Even when we know we are wrong, our tendency is to look for ways to excuse ourselves and defend our actions.

Not so with Jesus. Let us pause to marvel at what Frederick Leahy called: “The infinite strength of the silent sufferer.” What he endured was an indignity beyond the scope of our imagination. Isaiah 53:7-9 says:

- *“He was oppressed.”* This is the same word used in Exodus 1:11-14 to describe how the Egyptian slave masters treated the Israelites. They brutally tormented them, forced them to make bricks without straw and intensified their pressure and misery until the Israelites groaned and cried out for help. Jesus was oppressed like the Israelites. He was stalked, harassed and brutalized by His enemies all the way to His gruesome death.
- *“He was afflicted.”* That means He was humiliated, treated with contempt, shamed, belittled, scorned and mocked. They accused Him of blasphemy, lying and sedition. *“Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, ‘Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?’”* (Matthew 26: 67-68).
- *“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.”* As dreadful as it would be for us to be unjustly accused, at least we would have the hope of having the charges dropped and being set free. Not so with Jesus—He knew He was being led to hostility, viciousness and violence.
- *“He was sheared like a sheep.”* John Piper writes, “He was stripped of his clothes, his friends, his honor, his divine protection. No one has ever been as naked as Jesus on the Golgotha of Good Friday. No one has ever been as sheared of everything pleasant and beautiful—except love.”
- *“By oppression and judgment he was taken away.”* His trials were a mockery of justice. There was no one to defend Him, no time for both sides to be heard or cooler heads to prevail. It was all done hastily, in the darkness of night, in an intoxicated frenzy of bloodthirsty prejudice.
- *“And as for his generation, who considered...”* Who stopped to ponder the gravity of what was taking place? The most profound transaction in the universe—bringing salvation to multitudes of rebel sinners—was unfolding before our very eyes; but we were blind to the wonder and majesty of it all. We didn’t even stop to consider.
- *“He was cut off...He was stricken.”* These words signify that Jesus’ death was violent and awful. He was thoughtlessly amputated from society and discarded. Their plan was to assign Him an undignified grave with the wicked and treat Him just like any other criminal. They didn’t know Who He was.
- But He knew Who He was and voluntarily, willingly and deliberately submitted Himself to all of it; though He didn’t deserve any of it. Isaiah makes that very clear at the end of verse nine: *“He*

had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.” Not only were His actions full of mercy, love and kindness, but also His words were 100% pure and undiluted truth.

James says, *“For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body”* (James 3: 2). Behold the Man upon a cross—the Perfect Man. No deceit was found in His mouth.

When Job was afflicted with the loss of all his possessions and sons and daughters, and his body was covered with sores, even that man whom Scripture commends as a paragon of patience cursed the day he was born (Job 3:1). When Moses, the meekest man who had ever walked this earth, was finally provoked by the incessant grumblings of the people he had led with long-suffering, his rash words cost him entry into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:11-12). Even the Apostle Paul, who bore his cross and modeled self-denial to a point most of us have never approached, reviled the high priest during his trial (Acts 23:1-5). But not Jesus.

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)*

At the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, Jesus was given a mock trial in the middle of the night: *“And the high priest stood up and said, ‘Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?’ But Jesus remained silent”* (Matthew 26:62-63). Early the next morning, after having been up all night, Jesus faced the Roman governor Pilate: *“And Pilate again asked him, ‘Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.’ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed”* (Mark 15:4-5). When Pilate sent Him over to Herod, Herod *“questioned [Jesus] at some length, but [Jesus] made him no answer”* (Luke 23:9). Behold the submissive, suffering, silent Lamb of God.

He was not absolutely silent by any measure. When they questioned His identity as Messiah, He affirmed the truth of Who He was. From the Cross, He spoke brief but poignant words that have filled volumes of meditations on their meaning. But never did He speak a word of self-defense or justify Himself when tried by sinful men. Never did He cry out in protest against His tormentors and say, “I am innocent. I don’t deserve this.” *“...He opened not his mouth”* (Isaiah 53:7). He would speak only in obedience to His Father, and in keeping with His mission, never defend Himself against the demands and accusations of men.

And for His sovereign, sublime silence, we bow before Him in awestruck adoration. We worship Him with the wonder of one who wrote, “O blessed silence that lay at the heart of our redemption!”

Why Does His Silence Lay at the Heart of our Redemption?

1. **His silence shows He was perfectly in control of Himself and the whole chaotic scene.**

To remain silent when being tormented physically and mentally—when the core of your identity is being attacked—can only come from a deep confidence in the wisdom and providence of God's sovereign plan. Jesus was not like a lamb in intelligence. Unlike all the other animals who had been sacrificed in the Old Covenant for the sins of the people, here was a Lamb of God Who was in full control of His faculties. Jesus knew precisely what was happening to Him and why. He willingly, wholeheartedly, without hesitation or reservation, gave Himself over to it. He didn't fight back, panic or retaliate but kept entrusting Himself to His Heavenly Father Who would vindicate Him in due time. For this reason, when John the Baptist saw Jesus he said with prophetic clarity: “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). He is the only One Who could.

2. **Had Jesus spoken in His own defense, His case would have been so compelling that all His accusers would have been silenced.** With one word, He could have freed Himself from their oppressive hands. But Jesus voluntarily agreed to take upon Himself every bitter thought and evil deed that you and I have ever done or desire to do. He agreed to have His blood-stained brow crowned with our sins and to stand in our place. If Jesus had protested His own innocence, He could not have borne away our guilt. We would have no defense if He had defended Himself. One preacher said, "If Jesus had taken up His own defense...He would have won! But we would have lost, and we would be lost for all eternity."

3. **Because Jesus was silent when He suffered, He has now earned the right to continually make intercession for us.** John Calvin says, “He is now our Advocate before God, always having His mouth open.” The Apostle John in the book of Revelation heard the voice of the risen Christ “*like the sound of many waters*” (Revelation 14:2). Jesus speaks today in sovereign majesty and—listening to His voice—the dead receive new life! He speaks and the accuser of our souls flees. When our own guilt, fears and sorrows rise, He intercedes and pleads for us, keeping and renewing our faith.

When Satan tempts us to despair
and tells us all the guilt within,

upward we look and see him there,
who made an end to all our sin.

(Before the Throne of God Above by Charitie Lees Smith)

We can know that at the right hand of the Father is Someone Who knows our name and never stops pleading on our behalf. Had He opened His mouth before dying for our sins, He would not be able to stand as our Advocate before the Father at the right hand of God.

4. Because Jesus was silent in His sufferings, He is worthy of all our trust and our lifelong imitation. We too will be called to suffer in this world. The Apostle Peter meditates on Isaiah 53:

"If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called [you—God's people—have been called to suffer], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [Listen as Peter reflects on Isaiah 53.] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2: 20b-25).

As you behold the sovereign, silent, suffering Servant of God dying on your behalf; as you see His sufferings for you—how meekly and willingly He submitted Himself, knowing full well what it would cost Him—let Him free you from crippling anxiety over what others say and think about you and how to get their approval. Let Him release you from the restless yearning for revenge against people who have done you injustice. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit, that you would never be overcome by evil, but rather overcome evil with good.

When St. Augustine was being transformed by the majestic meekness of Jesus Christ in his life, he prayed, "O Lord, deliver me from this lust of always having to vindicate myself." Deliver me from the lust of always having to defend and make myself look good in the eyes of others!

Praise God that Jesus, your Savior, was entirely free from any lust to vindicate Himself. Rather, He entrusted Himself to the One Who judges justly. Look at Him first as your Savior and then as your example. Oh to be free like Jesus. Oh to be free, in this day of 24/7 social media where we have the constant pressure of seeking admiration and polishing our image to make ourselves look good in other's

eyes. How liberating instead, and how compelling our witness would be, if we would gladly embrace this blessed silence that lay at the heart of our redemption!

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we first bow before You as our Savior. We thank You for willingly submitting like a lamb to the slaughter. You did not open Your mouth to defend Yourself so that You can ever live to defend us—whom You have freed by Your blood from all our sins. Jesus, we also look to You as our example and pray that You would deliver us from the lust of always desiring to vindicate ourselves. Instead, help us to live peacefully and calmly, trusting ourselves to the One Who judges justly. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for showing us the way through Your death. We worship You now. Amen

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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